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THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND



# THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

*The War in the First Person*

*edited by*

F. B. CZARNOMSKI

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WOKING

TO  
CHRISTOPHER



## INTRODUCTION

THE title given to this collection of Polish war stories suggested itself. "They Fight for Poland" has been said of the Poles again and again during the last hundred and fifty years, ever since Prussian and Russian trickery, conspiracy and violence thrice partitioned and finally destroyed the ancient Republic of Poland, just as at the beginning of the present war the collusion of the same two tyrannies once more temporarily put an end to Polish liberty.

During the hundred and twenty years of Poland's struggle for independence each generation of Poles rose at least once to take up arms and fight for their freedom. And when—fighting again and again against impossible odds—the Poles were defeated in their own country, they emigrated in their thousands and, throwing their forces into the fight for freedom in country after country, they fought to save or restore liberty in America, in France, in Spain, Santo Domingo, Italy, Hungary, Belgium and Turkey.

Everywhere during the nineteenth century and later the struggle for freedom was recognized and participated in by Poles as a struggle for the freedom of Poland, and it was only natural that the Poles adopted the battle-cry: For Our Freedom and Yours. Under that same battle-cry the Polish Army, Navy and Air Force in Britain are fighting to-day.

The wheel of history has turned full circle. Once again, as after the partition of Poland in 1795, Polish soldiers, men without a country, are fighting in distant



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lands for freedom. And in recognition of the truism that a nation cannot die so long as its people live to fight for its independence, to-day they sing the same marching song, which they first sang a hundred and forty-four years ago—"As long as we live Poland shall not perish." As the words and music of that song, now Poland's National Anthem, come to mind, memory also recalls the story of its genesis.

It was the late autumn of the year 1797. General Napoleon Bonaparte was in the midst of his Italian campaign, while in distant Poland Russian and Prussian soldiery were crushing all the attempts of a liberty-loving people to regain their freedom. Two years before the third and final partition of Poland had been consummated by the same predatory slave empires which to-day have once more driven humanity into the dreadful carnage of war.

The Polish people had risen in a last desperate attempt to break the shackles. The national forces rallied under their leader, Thadeus Kościuszko. Peasants armed only with scythes were hurriedly formed into battalions of infantry. At Raclawice a glorious victory was won by the gallantry of these peasant scythesmen. But the overwhelming might of Russia and Prussia prevailed, and at Maciejowice the Polish armies were defeated, and Kościuszko was wounded, captured and dragged to Petersburg. The Russian barbarian general, Suvoroff, turned his savage hordes of Asiatic horsemen loose in the sack of Warsaw. The ghastly slaughter of thousands of men, women and children at Praga horrified the civilized world just as the destruction of Warsaw has done in our own days. Poland was left prostrate as she is to-day. But the spirit of the Polish people remained unconquerable then as now. Officers, soldiers, students, workmen and peasants in their thousands, thirsting for battle, escaped

## INTRODUCTION

the clutches of their enemies. Just as their descendants did eighteen months ago, they tramped across the entire continent to rally round the standard of liberty raised by the revolutionary armies of France. During Napoleon's campaign in Italy, Polish legions were formed under General Henryk Dabrowski. In a camp near Mantua the Polish legionaries gathered round the camp fires to talk of Poland, to mourn over and resolve to live for their tormented mother country. Just as to-day, under the free sky of Scotland, Polish soldiers are longingly turning their eyes to their native land, so grievously crushed by the bestial invaders.

There, in that Italian camp, the great Polish patriot and statesman Joseph Wybicki wrote the words of the marching song of the legionaries. It was set to the music of a Polish mazurka, and was adopted by the people as Poland's National Anthem.

"As long as we live Poland shall not perish," sang the legionaries, calling on their commander-in-chief to lead them. "March, march, Dabrowski, from the soil of Italy to the soil of Poland." "As long as we live, Poland shall not perish" Polish soldiers, sailors and airmen sing to-day, and they too call on their commander-in-chief to lead them "from the soil of Scotland to the soil of Poland."

The men about whom the following stories are told have dedicated their lives to the cause of human liberty and of the dignity of man. Their unfaltering struggles in Poland, in France, in Norway, on the seas around these islands, in the air above this, their second mother country, will continue till Poland is free again. *They Fight for Poland* provides only a glimpse of the mortal combat in which Poland is engaged, but the spirit it reveals fully justifies the splendid words of the inspired leader of the Allied forces, Mr. Winston Churchill, uttered on the day

## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

when the German hordes desecrated the stones of Warsaw:

“The soul of Poland is indestructible and she will rise again like a rock, which may for a spell be submerged by a tidal wave, but which remains a rock.”

F. B. CZARNOMSKI

LONDON, *June 1941*

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# THE DOOMED DIVISION

*by* COLONEL M.  
of the Divisional Staff of  
the 11th Division of Infantry  
*as told to* JERZY ŁUŻYC



# I

## THE DOOMED DIVISION

THE story of the battles fought by the 11th Infantry Division under Colonel Bronislaw Prugar-Ketling in the tragic and all too brief Polish war is typical of the fighting in Poland generally. Attacked by a crushing superiority in numbers and material equipment, encircled on three sides—North, West and South—with their rear threatened from the East by the Soviet forces, the Polish armies, caught while still mobilizing, fought gallantly without hope and without support for nearly the whole month of September 1939.

In peacetime the 11th Infantry Division was stationed at Stanislawow in South-Eastern Poland. At the outbreak of the war the division received its battle orders, and on September 2nd the first units, without anti-tank guns, entrained for the West. Three battalions, each from a different regiment, were to leave Stanislawow later, and these were to be followed by the Divisional Commander and Staff.

Following after the main body of the division, the three battalions had to detrain on reaching Solotwina, as the railway track had been destroyed, and after a forced march they took up their positions on the flank of General Boruta Spiechowicz's Army. Owing to the disorganization of the railways, consequent upon mass raids by the German Luftwaffe, it was not possible for these three battalions to make contact with their own division, and after a forced march they were attached to another army. Other units of the 11th Division were similarly scattered

along the 165 miles separating Stanislawow from the front.

When finally the bulk of the division took up positions on the River Wisloka, although its effectives had been reduced by the loss of the three battalions, it entered the war in a more satisfactory condition than most of the other divisions. Colonel Prugar-Ketling had under his command six battalions of infantry, two divisions of artillery, and part of the divisional baggage trains and other equipment. He had no anti-aircraft guns, however, and from the outset was condemned to manœuvre by night, hiding in the forests, and to rely on sudden surprise assaults, marches and counter-marches.

On September 7th—so Colonel M. began his story—we got into touch with the 24th Division on our right flank, which, without artillery, had to meet the attack of the enemy's mechanized columns. By then Jaslo, in the South, was already in German hands. The enemy applied their pincer tactics, but our division, situated in the centre, was not at first disturbed. But soon the two flanks of our division were uncovered. Silence reigned over our carefully constructed fortified positions on the Wisloka. Then we were ordered to withdraw, and had to abandon these positions without firing a shot.

The division had to march forty miles in order to withdraw from contact with the enemy, escape from the pincer formation, and gain at least another twenty-four hours in order to fortify its new position. All night and all the following day the forced march eastwards continued along the line Fryszak-Barycz, delayed by rear-guard actions and many dive-bombing raids from the Luftwaffe.

There was no possibility of making contact with other detachments of our army. The Divisional Commander sent out night reconnaissances in all directions, for the

## THE DOOMED DIVISION

general situation was steadily deteriorating, and for two days we had had no contact with our other forces. Direct attempts to make contact with Colonel Maczek's Motorized Brigade, which was withdrawing through Rzewosz towards Lancut, were unsuccessful. The attempt to gain indirect contact with the brigade, and to achieve a mutual co-ordination of effort through the command of General Lukowski's group, was likewise a failure.

Reconnaissance detachments, which were sent out during the night of September 9th, returned about noon the next day with the following information:

In the West, along the line of retreat of the 11th Division, large unidentified German forces were moving, and their advanced elements were already in contact with our own rearguard outposts.

At noon, under cover of our fire, elements of our own 24th Infantry Division and the group of Colonel Stawarz crossed the River San. The German Second (Highland) Division following them moved slowly, delayed by destroyed bridges, and only towards the evening of the next day were their advance-guards on the heights of Barycz.

In the North the German Fourth Light Armoured Division passed between the 11th Infantry Division and Colonel Maczek's Brigade, and, avoiding our opposition, proceeded in the direction of Radymno, while part of its forces played havoc in our rear, cutting us off from all supplies, and weakening our contact with the group commander, the hospitals, and the ammunition stores in Przemyśl.

The officer commanding the reconnaissance company of the 49th Regiment, Lieutenant Kurylo, carried on an effective two days' guerilla struggle against the armoured forces, destroying several lorries and taking prisoners. At one point during these skirmishes, which occurred mainly

at night, he came upon some carts filled with Polish uniforms, which a "Polish" sergeant—in reality a German "diversionist"—was in the act of distributing to a party of Germans in civilian clothes. They were destroyed to the last man: some were held for examination, as the company had no interpreter. Where could one find staff officers, military police, or unit police in this war, which was so different from any other war?

Owing to Lieutenant Kurylo's good work, our immediate rear was cleared for a time. The suspect German stragglers suddenly vanished from the Barycz-Dynow-Przemysl line. Only some days later, in the forests around Janow and near Lwow, did diversionist action develop at all strongly; but by then, unhappily, Lieutenant Kurylo and many of his lads were missing—they had paid for their valour with their lives.

The commander of the 2nd Infantry Division sent a reconnaissance detachment to the village of Blazow, under the command of Lieutenant Szczot, a fiery and outstanding officer. Reaching their destination at dawn, they organized an ambush for the expected enemy armoured column. The ambush consisted of a small Polish platoon with one heavy and three light machine-guns, and one automatic, with which they proposed to attack a German armoured detachment of considerable strength.

The very audacity of the task brought its reward. Hidden in the houses and lofts, Lieutenant Szczot and his men calmly allowed the advance-guard of the detachment to pass—armoured cars, motor cycles, light caterpillars, batteries, part of the motorized infantry, and pioneers—while he kept careful count of them. Only when the cars of the chief command appeared between the advance-guard and the main forces did they open a well-directed fire. The automatic put out of action the large lorry of the command, the car which followed it,

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and a caterpillar lorry carrying infantry, while the three light machine-guns sowed death among the occupants of the destroyed machines. The heavy machine-guns and the snipers aimed at the machines of the main force, causing a panic in the column, and inflicting serious losses on the massed infantry. As the result the main column, taking advantage of a cross-road in the vicinity, turned northwards, carrying their dead and wounded with them, leaving three shattered machines and many dead on the spot. In the lorry occupied by the command the Poles found the bodies of seven dead officers and important military documents. Three officers carrying despatch-cases, who leaped out of the car and tried to run in the direction taken by their main force, defended themselves with revolvers, and fell after wounding two of our men. They proved to be the colonel in command of the column, his chief of staff, and an adjutant.

Exact plans of the German operations were found on the three men. Rough red lines were drawn on the maps, from which it appeared that a Bavarian corps, consisting of the 7th and the 1st Divisions, was hard on our heels; that farther to the North was the 45th Division, with the 44th in its rear, and that farther North still there was the 4th Light Motorized Division, the one with which our patrol had dealt so effectively. We did not know that to the South a German Highland Division was moving along a line parallel with us, through the foothills of the Carpathians.

So the Germans had six well-equipped divisions, one of them motorized. On the Polish side there were, reckoning from the North, Maczek's Brigade, which was already seriously shaken by heavy fighting, the incomplete 11th Division, and the remnants of the completely shattered 24th Division, which had absorbed the remnants of Colonel Stawarz' group.



## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

We had to retreat, but there could be no thought of doing so in the daytime. Meanwhile the Germans were already coming up and beginning to press on us.

As we entered Barycz the divisional quartermaster, Captain Jedziniak, "scrounged" an abandoned heavy battery, together with stores of food enough to feed the whole division for a day. This he placed in the barns of the village, feeling that one vital problem was settled for the next twenty-four hours. Meanwhile ten German caterpillars drove right up to the village from the rear and set fire to the barns with their shells. Our artillery was standing by. The gunners' blood began to boil; the quartermaster, Jedziniak, who was himself an artilleryman, happened to be among them; so they limbered up the guns, drove out to the front of the burning barns, and gave the caterpillars such a pasting that they were put completely out of action.

While the enemy was drawing near the Polish 11th Division had retreated by night to Bachorz on the San. At all costs we had to reach them by dawn; we could not halt at any nearer point, for the Germans knew our line of retreat, and would bombard us mercilessly.

It was September 11th. On this day General Sosnkowski, in Lwow, received the unexpected order to take over the command of the South.

The division was again concentrated at Bachorz, from which point it sent out patrols in all directions. Around it were apparently empty meadows, fields and forests, through which, as we knew from German documents, the enemy divisions were moving upon us from all sides.

The reconnaissance party to the North-East vainly tried to obtain news of Colonel Maczek's Brigade. Such failure was a strange thing in these days of wireless, but during the very first days of the fighting our three mobile units

## THE DOOMED DIVISION

had fallen into enemy hands and our field wireless had lapsed into silence.

The reconnaissance to the North reported that the flank column of the motorized division which we had ambushed near Blazow was hurrying along at breakneck speed through Radymno, so that the Polish division need not trouble about it any more.

The reconnaissance to the South discovered that along the River San were already moving detachments of the German Highland Division, but that somewhere beyond the San, in the neighbourhood of Bircza, there were certain Polish forces on the defence.

As he had received no orders, and had no contact with the higher command, Colonel Prugar-Ketling decided to go to the aid of these troops. He sent for a young artillery subaltern, and told him: "Lieutenant, at all costs you must inform those men at Bircza that they are to hold out until to-morrow at noon, that we are going to cross the San below Nienadow and attack the Germans on the flank. Try to get to them on horseback. Remember that if you succeed in executing this order you're sure of the Cross of Valour, and possibly the Cross of Virtuti Militari."

It was known later that the officer carried out this order, but was unable to rejoin his regiment. What happened to him is doubtful, but one thing is certain—he did not get the Cross of Virtuti Militari, and even his name is not recorded.

When night fell, our 48th Infantry Regiment succeeded in crossing the San below Nienadow, and was about to strike at the enemy flank when an order suddenly arrived:

"Withdraw on Przemyśl with partial defence at the town of Babica and Krzywiec. Report the execution of the order with a triple 'Yes.'"

General Sosnkowski, as he told the Commander of the

## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

11th Infantry Division afterwards, had ordered General Fabrycy to exploit the advanced position of the 11th Division in order to carry out a flank attack from the North against the exposed German forces in the South, separating them from the front with the forces of the 24th Infantry Division, Colonel Stawarz' group. The Army Staff was of the opinion, however, that the German unit which had advanced thus far, leaving its flank open to the 11th Infantry Division, was the 2nd Highland Division.

"On September 12th at noon"—so General Sosnkowski told me—"General Fabrycy came to me, and, wringing his hands, reported that both the 24th and the 11th Divisions had moved off northwards, in spite of orders. I was furious with him, and thoroughly disgusted at the loss of such a fine opportunity."

General Sosnkowski's order, promptly transmitted by the Army Command, did not reach either the 11th or the 24th Division, chiefly because on September 11th the group commander, General Lukowski, to whom the order was sent, changed his headquarters three times, and so that contact was not established.

Grasping the situation, Colonel Prugar-Ketling intuitively guessed at General Sosnkowski's plan of operations and on his own initiative he came to an understanding with the officer commanding the 24th Division, ordering the 11th Division on the morning of the 12th to strike at the flank of the German forces which engaged the 24th Division below Bircza. The manœuvre was well planned and properly directed, and it might have been a complete success, especially as it developed without very serious opposition. Unfortunately the commander of the 24th Division, unaware of the new situation of his own and the enemy's forces, and in ignorance of General Sosnkowski's order, called off the attack and issued the order to

## THE DOOMED DIVISION

withdraw along the line of Dubienko-Babice-Krzywcza to Przemyśl, in accordance with the original plan; a move which Colonel Prugar-Ketling could do nothing to prevent, as contact was again broken.

So the 48th Regiment was recalled across the San, and the detachments massing behind it were withdrawn likewise. Orders were orders. Perhaps there was greater need of us there. What could a Divisional Commander know, without reconnaissances? We abandoned the troops in Bircza, who, deluded by the hope of succour, continued fighting, as we afterwards learned, until the evening when the Germans cut off their line of retreat. On the 13th, General Sosnkowski arrived by an aeroplane to join the forces cut off near Przemyśl. The situation was more than critical. Lwow itself had been surrounded by Germans on the previous day, and it was impossible to extricate the troops; but somehow the scattered Polish forces had to be concentrated, the pressure on Lwow relieved, and the non-existent front created.

The situation on the morning of September 13th was as follows:

The 44th and 45th Divisions (the 17th Army Corps) were concentrated on a line covering Radymno. On the West the German 1st and 7th Infantry Divisions (the Bavarian Corps) were in immediate contact with the small Polish forces. South of the San the German Second Highland Division was concentrating, while on the North the motorized division was making a frantic drive through Radymno and Jaworow, whence it probably went on to Rawa Ruska, part of it turning off toward Lwow. Detachments drawn from the 1st and 7th German Divisions, with armoured elements, were sent concentrically towards Letownia to cut off the retreat of our own Infantry Division; so that the eastern route, hitherto the only open one, was now closed.

## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

In this situation the 11th Division had to hold out all day at Krzywcz, twice throwing back an enemy attack from the West and South, and suffering serious losses from his artillery. These losses affected mainly the artillery of the 48th Infantry Regiment, which at one observation point lost the platoon commander, two non-commissioned officers, and a telephonist; but the enemy's losses were far higher. First-rate observation posts, giving a good view of the countryside, facilitated the work of our artillery. The commander of the divisional artillery, Colonel Gruzinski, and all the battery commanders were continually at their posts, giving the orders to fire, and blazing away until the earth shook and the air trembled, and German cars, transport lorries, caterpillars, motor-cycles and guns were shattered, while the infantry columns grew thinner and thinner, and finally broke. The heavy artillery dominated the enemy's fire, as though it wished to show its gratitude for our taking over the abandoned battery at Barycz, and what our guns failed to do our machine-guns did at closer range.

Towards evening the situation worsened on our left wing, where the Germans succeeded in piercing our concentrations, threatening our artillery. Our immediate counterstroke threw the enemy back across the San. There was no time to be lost. We had to get away quickly and make our way to Przemyśl by night. Hardly had the advance-guards dropped down from the Krzewiecki hills, while the rearguard was still fighting in our last positions, when information was received from the reconnaissance detachment of the 49th Infantry, under Lieutenant Kurylo, that the Germans had closed the road near Lentownia.

Lentownia lies some seven kilometres from Przemyśl. Colonel Prugar-Ketling resorted to a Polish manoeuvre, the only one which had any success in this war: he

ordered the guns of the infantry to go ahead and fire straight along the road, which gleamed white in the pale moonlight, aiming at close range at the flash of the enemy machine-guns and field-guns. He ordered the riflemen's companies to load their rifles, to follow one another closely, and then to fix bayonets and charge.

The German division broke, and we captured armoured cars, lorries, motor-cycles and important military documents, which afterwards enabled General Sosnkowski to obtain a true picture of the enemy positions on an extensive front, and to make the necessary decisions during the following days.

As usual in night engagements, the casualties were not numerous. The spirit of the men was so good that they wanted to sing. The Divisional Commander led the way on to the bridge below Przemyśl, followed by his staff.

It was midnight, and General Sosnkowski, who had returned from Krosiczyna and Lentownia, was now working in the garrison clubroom, bending over his maps: the commander of a front *in partibus infidelium*, of an incompletely deployed army. With him were General Lukowski, Colonel Demel, and myself.

All day the sound of heavy artillery, the rumour of the battle of Krzywczyna, had been heard in Przemyśl, and since dusk the cannonade from Lentownia, some four miles distant, had grown heavier. Again and again General Sosnkowski started up from his maps and listened. How in this difficult situation could he draw up a plan of action, when he had nothing whatever to go upon, and no certainty that Prugar-Ketling's Division would break through?

Suddenly Colonel Prugar-Ketling stood on the threshold.

"And the division . . .?" Sosnkowski asked.

## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

"It's coming up. The head of the column is already crossing the bridge."

General Sosnkowski was delighted. The 11th was a Division which was tempered by days of battle, which had not allowed itself to be shattered, and, above all, it had shown initiative. The Divisional Commander, Prugar-Ketling, was also delighted. Now there would be an end of the abandonment by order and without fighting of strongly fortified positions; there would be an end of the impotent groping in all directions by patrols working in darkness.

General Sosnkowski at once set to work. Two trucks of ammunition were found somewhere on the railway line. He went out into the square in front of the club-house. In the darkness an officer stood to attention before him. This was a liaison officer, Captain Dudzinski. Separated from his detachment, he had found a leaderless but well-equipped field communications company. He had assumed its command and had reported for orders. The company was at once attached to the 11th Division. That day Captain Dudzinski also was delighted: he had a commander.

Unfortunately, in this amazing war telephonic communications failed to function, for every line laid down with such effort had been destroyed by enemy bombs, or by our own supply columns, swollen beyond all measure by the absorption of streams of refugees.

As a magnet attracts iron filings, so the more energetic detachments attracted stragglers. The division was gathering strength in its various detachments and services, and even in heavy artillery.

## TO THE RELIEF OF LWOW

What had General Sosnkowski at his disposal? In addition



A COMPANY OF THE XITH DIVISION





A PLATOON OF POLISH CAVALRY

## THE DOOMED DIVISION

to the 11th Division he had also the 38th Reserve Division, which had been long on the march, and was now concentrating near Mosciska. The 11th Division had barely six battalions, each numbering not more than three hundred men. After the defeat of September 7th, only ragged remnants were left of the 24th Division; including Colonel Stawarz' group, the infantry numbered hardly one thousand. The three "divisions" were left with some eight thousand rifles between them. They had no motorized elements, not a single aeroplane, and no anti-aircraft guns. The equipment of the 38th Infantry Division was also very poor; it possessed barely a dozen anti-tank guns. Its transport had suffered severely, and it had lost heavily on the march.

General Sosnkowski possessed no means of communication whatever. The divisions had only field telephones which were of little value in this chaotic war, and one short-wave apparatus with a practical range of some thirty miles, while its code was known to the enemy. There were no maps of the regions to the east of Przemyśl; only the 38th Reserve Division, which was the last to be mobilized, possessed a few. There were no rear supplies, and evacuation was impossible, as communications with the neighbouring Polish Army were cut by the enemy. On the other hand, we had innumerable baggage wagons, crammed with refugees and the staffs of various evacuated authorities. This baggage train included everything: lorries of the frontier guards and auxiliary services, the remnants of reserve formations, fire brigades, and even training batteries of heavy artillery; in other words, guns without ammunition caissons, without ammunition, without gun crews, and drawn by worn-out horses. The infantry of this so-called army consisted merely of a sea of baggage-wagons, which took all night to pass, clattering up the road, impeding communications and hindering

the movement of fighting detachments, becoming indeed a danger to them, a trap, an impediment, a burden, a positive curse!

"Szyling has been ordered to concentrate in the district of Rawa-Ruska and Jaworow," said General Sosnkowski. "I shall remain with you, as you are in the worse plight. We must relieve Lwow as quickly as possible, before the enemy cuts off our road and assembles larger forces."

Turning to Colonel Prugar-Ketling, he added:

"You've come straight from a battle, I know, but I can't give you any rest; we must adopt some more effective grouping. Your division must move on at once, in order to be on the same line as the 38th Reserve Division. You are already a day late."

"Very good, General!"

It was past midnight, but not all the division had as yet reached Przemyśl. The troops which had arrived crowded the principal square and the neighbouring streets, and the dead city presented a strange aspect in the moonlight; for the soldiers, curled up against the walls of the houses, were sleeping beside their machine-gun carriers, leaning against ammunition-boxes, or crowding on the numerous baggage-wagons which had somehow found their way into Przemyśl. Many horses—the true martyrs of war—were feeding from their nose-bags. Where had their drivers managed to scrounge forage?

The Colonel gazed at his division, which already had ten days of fighting and marching behind it. The order passed along the motionless forms. The long-service professional non-commissioned officers dragged the soldiers to their feet.

When day approached, the tail end of the division was still in Przemyśl. It had fought its way to Przemyśl; now it had to fight its way out again. The movement which

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in theory was to take place at night began by day. Early in the morning the division set out, leaving one battalion with a battery in Przemyśl at General Sosnkowski's disposal to act as a rearguard. This rearguard was to defend that portion of Przemyśl that lies on the eastern bank of the River San, and to cover the river crossing as long as possible.

The river crossing—but how unnecessary the words seemed on those beautiful September days of 1939! The rivers were all dried up; the San was a trickling rivulet which artillery and caterpillars could ford wherever they wished. The battalion fulfilled its task splendidly, shattering several of the Germans' caterpillars, and the division marched on.

The German aeroplanes raided us at frequent intervals. There was no shelter anywhere: nothing, on every side, but the accursed plain. The soldiers rushed off the road, trying to take cover in the furrows, but the horses were in a worse plight. After one of the raids we counted thirty-five dead horses, and a few days later the divisional artillery lost eighty-seven horses in a single raid. Such a march was not like the march of an army; it was more like the flight of some Biblical people, driven onward by the wrath of Heaven, and dissolving in the wilderness.

As the division approached Mosciska, some eighteen miles from Przemyśl, the Commander stood at the side of the road and watched the men as they wearily trudged by.

There was no question here of a march past; but as the soldiers turned their heads in the "Eyes right!" the Colonel asked them simply:

"Can you stick it, lads?"

And he could still see the gleam in their eyes, the spark of that fire with which Szczot's company had shattered the armoured column near Blazow, with which the 48th Regiment had set out to cut off Bircza, before it shed its

blood in defence of the Krzywiewski hills, and with which the 49th Infantry Regiment had made its nocturnal bayonet charge near Lentownia.

"We'll stick it!"

Along the straggling column, where the infantry was mixed up with the artillery, and the never-ending train of baggage-wagons, General Sosnkowski drove up. He had already heard a great deal about the division, though this was the first time he had seen it. It must have made a favourable impression on him, for his genial comment to the Divisional Commander was: "You fight magnificently, but I don't believe you're fond of marching!" He knew, of course, of the efforts which the division had made; he was well aware that the men had had no rest for four days, had gone without sleep, had eaten but little, and had fought during the daytime; so the soldiers of the 11th Division took his little jest as in good part.

"The more I think of the situation at Przemyśl," said Colonel Prugar-Ketling afterwards, "the more I feel how right General Sosnkowski was in driving us on to put forth our utmost effort. I know that at Krasiczyn the Chief of Staff of the 24th Division pleaded with him for just one day's rest. But if General Sosnkowski had yielded we should inevitably have perished before Przemyśl."

Unfortunately, we could not make a long halt at Mosciska. Night, the friend of the Polish soldier, was drawing near to wrap us in its cloak, to cool our hands and burning brows. But now even the night was a merciless ordeal, for the march continued.

While the dark silhouettes passed for hours through the silent villages, in one of the huts the staff was at work behind curtained windows. They studied the map. A wonderful thing, a map! When you look at it in times of peace, it suggests a thousand images and experiences. You can picture the rising roads, the swamps, the ranges

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of hills, the villages scattered about the countryside, the approaches to the cities, and the many streams, each following its own direction. . . . But in time of war every railway-track becomes a problem, every bridge an enigma, and the black needle pointing North—South confronts one with a mortal dilemma. Then the map ceases to be beautiful, for every inch of it is full of lurking menace.

It was suggested that we should move into five or six highland districts, with Rumania and Hungary as our hinterland, and secure the mountain passes. In the highlands the Polish Army, which was dispersed rather than actually destroyed, could be concentrated. There was plenty of equipment which could have been diverted into this corner of Poland; there need have been no shortage of supplies and ammunition.

But Lwow—*Semper Fidelis*—surrounded but defending itself, was waiting. To the North the decimated army of General Szyling was still fighting, and there was no reason why it should not have fought its way through to the South. Who would co-ordinate the movements of the numerous Polish fronts, imprudently extended along a line of six hundred miles?

So on the night of September 15th we moved on towards Lwow. During the day the Commander-in-chief had given the order: "General Sosnkowski is to retreat to the South, to the crossing of the River Stryj." This order made no mention of the decision which had been taken the previous day, when General Szyling's Army had been removed from General Sosnkowski's command. The order to retire to the East, dated September 14th, was dropped by a pilot hedgehopping in an unarmed plane over the treetops during the height of the battle near Janow; a plane that sped like a grey lark before the Dorniers which were spreading over the sky.

General Sosnkowski did not change his decision. He

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must keep faith with Lwow. He had the active and indomitable 11th Division at his disposal, and he believed that he would succeed in fighting his way through to Lwow; though no one could say whether, as matters stood, a flanking march to the South, between the line of the Wereszcza, held by the enemy, and the German divisions which were approaching from the West, was in any way possible.

Near Sadowa Wisznia the 11th Division took to the forest, in the hope of getting a little sleep and some respite from the accursed bombers.

With the dawn came the day of judgment. Sadowa Wisznia suffered such a heavy bombardment that on his way to General Sosnkowski Colonel Prugar-Ketling had to dismount and go on foot; it was impossible to drive through the hail of bombs.

When for the hundredth time the German bombers made a dive attack on Sadowa Wisznia and swept all the life out of its narrow streets, General Sosnkowski calmly ordered an offensive in a north-easterly direction. We were cut off from Lwow by the marshy course of the River Wereszcza, which flowed through a series of lakes and swamps, and to take that direction under the enemy fire would have been fatal. General Sosnkowski accordingly made new dispositions for an attack north-eastwards. Avoiding the crossing of the Wereszcza marshes, the troops would bear to the left and make for the forest of Janow. This advance was to be made by the best troops, i.e. by the 11th Infantry Division. The 38th Infantry Division was to move on its flank, but a little more to the south, striking along two lines in the direction of the Janow forest. The remnants of the 24th Division were held as a general reserve. At the suggestion of the Commander of the 11th Division the attack was to be made late in the evening.

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All day the German artillery kept up a harassing fire upon Sadowa Wisznia and the neighbouring forest. In the east the enemy used mostly shrapnel, while a number of bombs demolished half the town. Colonel Prugar-Ketling returned to his command, and with his Chief of Staff, Colonel Popiel, he personally visited all the detachments, ascertaining their state of preparedness, giving orders and preliminary instructions. The northern verge of the Wiszniński forest had to be seized before nightfall to form the basis of the advance northwards. The Germans had already occupied parts of the forest, so they had to be driven out at dawn. The 48th and 49th Regiments were to do this.

Meanwhile the Germans tried to dispose of us by parleying with us. They sent envoys, who argued that we were surrounded by several of their divisions, and were doomed if we did not surrender. It was true that we were surrounded; we ourselves knew that. We knew the number and strength of the German divisions from their dispositions, and we knew how imposing those forces were. "Two Polish infantry divisions are completely encircled," said the German orders of the day on September 15th. The enemy evidently took no account of the unfortunate 24th Division, or rather its remnants, although only the day before these remnants had severely shaken the enemy to the South-West of Mosciska.

The envoys were sent packing by the commanders of the foremost companies, without even being allowed to see the Regimental Commander. Half an hour later the German bombers came over and dropped some incendiaries in the middle of the forest, while simultaneously the enemy artillery opened a murderous fire upon the columns of the 48th and 49th Regiments as they crept through the forest. To the accompaniment of this fire the two regiments opened the fight for the northern exits from



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the forest. The regimental artillery moved forward with the infantry, since it could not fire from the heart of the forest, and its best position would be on the left-hand edge of the latter. The artillery lost its commander, with several non-commissioned officers and gunners, but it gained its objective. It reached the edge of the forest, and by rapid fire opened a road for the infantry, breaking the enemy's resistance and driving him from the field. The ground for the coming battle was secured during the day, but we lost three officers and a considerable number of men killed and wounded.

### THE GERMAN DEFEAT AT JAWOROW

When it grew dark the depleted regiments of the 11th Division moved forward. The right wing consisted of the 49th Regiment, led by its bold and enterprising commander, Colonel Hodala. Along the northern road marched the 48th Regiment, commanded by Colonel Nowak. In reserve, following the 49th, came the 53rd Regiment, while on the right of the 49th the column of the 38th Division guarded the left flank.

Hardly had we begun to move when a withering fire broke out. The Germans had taken up strong positions, and had no intention of letting us through; nevertheless, the 11th Division pushed on. The 49th Regiment had to face the heaviest fire, so the officers of the Divisional Staff hurriedly made their way to them. Our losses were heavy, but the 49th broke through and began to move on to their next position.

There was no time to bury the dead. The Colonel took over the "Polish compass," the peasant guide, gave orders that all weapons were to be unloaded, and marching through the night at the head of the column he made his way to Muzylowice. But first he had a conference with

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General Sosnkowski concerning the 48th Regiment, which had been lagging behind somewhere.

The regiment marched on through the rustling undergrowth. After a while shouts of "Hurrah!" were heard above the thunder of the guns. The men were charging with fixed bayonets. The nearer gunfire died away, the more distant increased. The Colonel hastened to the village.

The bodies of bayoneted Germans were lying at the entrance to the village, and farther on, as the dawn was breaking, batteries, caterpillars, machine-guns, field kitchens, and motor-cycles were visible. The whole village was choked with them, and equipment of every kind was parked in the farmyards and in the village streets.

The dead Germans stared with fixed, unseeing eyes. Broad bands of black and white on their uniforms and the word "Germania" told us that the motorized regiment of the S.S. Guards, "Germania," had been utterly defeated.

General Sosnkowski rode up. His face wore a regretful expression.

"A fine anti-aircraft battery! Pity we can't take it with us!" From the outbreak of the war the 11th Division had been defenceless in the daytime, for it had no anti-aircraft guns.

There was also considerable booty in the neighbouring village of Mogilki, which a battalion under Major Litynski had captured.

There was no time to lose: the Germans were massing for a counter-attack. All this captured equipment had to be destroyed, as we had neither personnel nor fuel to enable us to move it.

One of the battalions of the 38th Division, which had evidently strayed off the road during the night, came marching through the village; the men, pale, hungry and

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in need of sleep, looked more like spectres than men. They recognized General Sosnkowski and gave him a cheer.

Warned to clear out, the people of the village hurriedly left their huts, with loud laments. It could not be helped; the laws of war are harsh. What are you to do with booty which you cannot carry off? Could these splendid guns and machines be allowed to go on spreading death and destruction in the ranks of our troops? Rivers of petrol pouring from the tanks, from the opened taps in the sides of the German lorries, were already blazing. These rivers linked up into lakes of fire. When the small-arm ammunition began to crackle in the fire everything living left Muzylowice.

Soon the shells began to explode with a thunder that resounded over the fields and through the forests. About an hour later German bombers flew over and released a hail of bombs over the unfortunate village, which was now blazing like an enormous torch. Already the infuriated enemy was snapping at us from the rear. Then someone remembered:

“But how about that other village, Czarnokonce?”

It was true the capture of guns and caterpillars, and an enormous quantity of motor equipment, had been reported from Czarnokonce also. The whole village was crammed with such booty; more than twice as much as in Muzylowice.

The General sent the divisional sappers to deal with it, but the Germans had already entered the village, and they drove the sappers back. Was all this material to fall back into the enemy's hands? General Sosnkowski sent his second-in-command, Colonel Demel, with the order to destroy everything. Where was the reserve? Colonel Kocur himself led the battalion. They attacked and drove out the Germans, the service corps following with their

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torches. The bullets began to crackle in the fire, the large-calibred shells warmed up and exploded, the armour of the cars grew red-hot, the splendidly equipped ammunition and baggage-lorries blazed with a dazzling flame.

The 48th Regiment went temporarily astray, wandering through other villages. With smiling faces they emerged from the forest undergrowth, each man pushing a motor-cycle, of which they had collected a large number. In two villages they had captured tanks, eight guns, six mortars, many smaller pieces, and machine-guns, all motorized. Most important of all, at dawn they had come upon the German column which had abandoned its guns and equipment at Muzylowice and Czarnokonce, and it had fled back across the fields in the direction of Jaworow, whence it had only recently advanced. Information came to hand that in the village of Mogilka another large quantity of mechanical equipment had been captured. From the length of the front it appeared that the Polish offensive had probably engaged the entire unit indicated in the captured documents as *Gemischtes Panzerkorps* (Mixed Armoured Corps).

Beyond Muzylowice, General Sosnkowski inspected two companies from the 11th Division. The soldiers were well provided with German tinned food. Their clothes were in tatters and their chins bore a fortnight's growth of beard, but they cheered lustily and marched in perfect step. In the middle of the column were captured German officers, who saluted by raising their hands. General Sosnkowski gave orders for them to be taken aside and placed in the charge of one of the Staff officers.

On the early evening of September 16th the 11th Division, battered but otherwise in good order, reached the forest of Janow. It immediately took steps to secure its rear, for the German avalanche was hard on its tracks. The prompt destruction of roads and bridges was of little

avail, for the drought, the worst for a number of years, was still continuing. No sacrifice, however great, could hold up that avalanche for long. One such has fixed itself in my memory.

A river of some considerable width, running through marshy land, was crossed by a bridge. A platoon commander, N.C.O. Jasiewicz, heavily mined the bridge and laid a short fuse. He sent the pioneers assigned to help him back to their platoon, saying that he could manage the job himself. For some reason they felt suspicious, and after retiring a few hundred yards one of the pioneers hid in the bushes and watched. He could see that the officer checked the charge, lit a cigarette and hid himself under the bridge embankment, where he lay quietly for a couple of hours. First a patrol of German cyclists appeared on the road; unsuspectingly they crossed the bridge. Some three hundred paces behind them came a column of infantry. The watching pioneer felt his heart sink as he saw the first rank of four march on to the bridge. Before his eye could take in the whole of the column the air was rent by a terrific explosion. The ranks of marching Germans flew into the air, then fell hurtling to the ground. The crumbling bridge crushed the Germans and the platoon commander. A terrified shout arose from the farther bank. The cyclists turned and went back over the river-bed, using the utmost caution. The pioneer took advantage of the confusion and hurried off to his company, where he reported that the platoon commander had blown a whole German company into the air, perishing himself in the explosion. His deed did not stop the advance of the Germans, but it must have damped the spirits of their infantry and weakened their later attacks. His heroism made it easier for the division to carry out its subsequent tasks—and those tasks were continually growing heavier. For the time being, how-

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ever, the division had to dig itself in without a moment's delay.

To the South of the 11th Division the handful of soldiers known as the 24th Division had occupied its allotted sector. The enemy redoubled his efforts and forced his infantry along at a killing pace, obviously anxious to finish off the meagre Polish forces. We clearly realized that the ring was closing around us, and that the German troops besieging Lwow were now not far distant. General Sosnkowski had decided that we must make for Janow, knowing that in this direction the River Wereszyca was less of an obstacle than elsewhere, and now he was anxious to know whether the crossing near Janow was free. The remnants of the 38th Reserve Division had been ordered to secure it.

## THE BATTLES NEAR JANOW

We had a succession of bad nights and very difficult days. During the evening and the night of September 17th news arrived confirming that the situation of the 38th Reserve Division was becoming precarious. After some initial successes the Divisional Commander, Colonel Wir-Konas, had struck at the marshes of the Wereszyca in a broad fan-shaped movement. The blow failed, and the division had to withdraw. Part of it, which had ventured too far southward, was cut off by German forces approaching from the rear. The larger part of the force had to make its way by night northwards to the Janow forests under extremely difficult conditions, passing between the line of the Wereszyca and the enemy advancing from the West. Late in the evening the Germans succeeded in thrusting a deep wedge between the 38th Division and the weak forces of the 24th Division. What with one thing and another, by midnight only the left flanking column of

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the 38th Division, which had entered the forest together with the 11th Division, had reached its appointed station.

To make things worse, Colonel Wir-Konas, with his staff and the divisional cavalry, had vanished into the unknown. Through the ranks of the division, thus deprived of its command at a very difficult moment, the rumour spread that Colonel Wir-Konas had been taken prisoner or was killed. However, he turned up in Janow late on the afternoon of the following day. The night of September 16th was very disturbed. German civilians from the district crawled up through the forest to the edge of the glades and took potshots at the detachments and the command. They probably also informed the Germans of our dispositions, for the enemy's artillery fire was extraordinarily well aimed and effective. One heavy battery sent over salvos of shells all night long at two-minute intervals, with clockwork regularity, aimed at the little grove in which General Sosnkowski had established his headquarters. Another objective was the grove in which the Staff of the 11th Division was situated.

We had to remain all the following day on the western edge of the forest, repulsing several German attacks and suffering heavily. But we held out.

Meanwhile, what was happening at Lwow, the Polish city in the south-eastern corner of the Republic, for whose sake General Sosnkowski had refused to retreat southwards from Przemysl? From the moment when he took over the command on the morning of September 11th he was anxious to provide for the defence of the city. There were four battalions and twelve guns in Lwow. The city was divided into sectors. Commanders were appointed, and the ten main exits were fortified as quickly as possible. With such meagre forces there could be no question of taking up defensive positions in front of the city, or of constituting reserves.

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About noon on September 12th the Germans approached the city from the West and the North-West. There were no anti-tank weapons in Lwow, and the field artillery was stationed in the open streets, without even infantry protection. The whole crew serving the gun in Grodecka Street was killed. When a fresh crew hurried up they found the last grievously wounded defender attempting to serve the gun by himself. Half the new crew fell also. But the attack was repulsed, and several German tanks were put out of action.

In the afternoon the first detachments of the 35th Reserve Division began to arrive, together with a battalion of another division. When on September 13th General Sosnkowski flew to the troops cut off near Przemyśl, the defensive forces of Lwow had increased to nine battalions of infantry and twenty-four field guns, not including Colonel Maczek's Brigade, stationed outside the city, but at the disposal of the defence command.

For six days Lwow fought. Every day fresh reinforcements arrived. In this war it was only necessary to create a nucleus of organization, a nucleus of defence, and immediately there was an influx of troops ready to fight. One old officer, a colonel on the reserve, brought in a detachment from Wilno, at the other side of Poland.

Further battalions of the 35th Reserve Division, which had not yet been in action, arrived by train. Anti-aircraft artillery turned up from somewhere; three hundred prisoners were taken; tanks were shattered; the garrison began to construct a complicated inner ring of defence; they grew so bold that they began to make sallies to the northward, where, according to report, Colonel Maczek's motorized units were hurrying toward the forest of Brzuchowice, in order to make a diversion in favour of General Sosnkowski's army. Unfortunately, at that moment Colonel Maczek, in obedience to the supreme



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command, was actually proceeding southwards with his brigade.

### THE 11TH DIVISION FIGHTS ITS WAY THROUGH TO BRZUCHOWICE

It was on the sixth day of the defence of Lwow—September 17th—that desperate fighting took place in the Janow forest, the heaviest burden again falling on the 11th Division. As I have already explained, one of its regiments consisted of two decimated battalions; the whole division was left with scarcely 1,200 rifles, and the neighbouring 24th Division, covering the more southerly entrance to the forest, had only some eight hundred rifles. The 38th Reserve Division was reassembling after its difficult night marches, and for the time being had to be left almost entirely out of the reckoning; so that altogether the Polish fighting front could count on some two thousand infantry only—less than a single full-strength infantry regiment.

The first attack came at dawn, against the 48th and 49th Regiments. It broke before the fire of the Polish artillery. At the same time the Germans attacked the neighbouring 24th Division. And on this very morning of September 17th the columns of Soviet tanks were speeding into the undefended eastern borderlands.

At noon there came a second attack on the right wing, held by the 48th Regiment. The German fire increased. The 48th suffered serious losses; hardly one of the regular officers was left; but the Germans were mown down in swathes. In the afternoon the Polish lines sustained a third attack. The Germans again struck heavily at the right wing, which we could not possibly relieve, and then at the whole line. In the forest, where the command was situated, the scene was infernal. Trees crashed down;

branches fell; six cars which were standing in front of the command were shattered; half a communications company (the fine unit which had turned up at Przemyśl) was put out of action; the divisional observation post, which General Sosnkowski did not leave for a moment, was continually under fire. The General was concerned about the division's way of retreat, which might be outflanked from the North. It ran through a certain cross-road in the forest, and the General insisted that this point must be secured by a battalion of the 53rd Regiment. He asked repeatedly whether this had been done and sent Colonel Demel to the 38th Divisional Command with the order to send another battalion to this point, and also to secure the point where the two battalions would cross to the western bank at Lelechowka.

Colonel Prugar-Ketling suggested that the division should withdraw. General Sosnkowski looked at his watch. It was two hours before dusk. The dense forest would make it easier to break away from the enemy.

"You can retire, Colonel," Sosnkowski decided. "Your line of march is to Brzuchowice. The rest of the forces will march along the high road through Janow to Rzesnia. I shall go with them; the 38th Division must be re-organized. I don't think you'll meet with any trouble. Your division is our chief hope."

The General waited a little longer, until the din of the battle in the forest told him that the fighting was close at hand: then, after shaking hands with the Colonel, he withdrew. The battalion of the 53rd Regiment had long since been sent to the right wing. It was to occupy the cross-roads, where at all costs it was to prevent the Germans from cutting off the division's line of retreat by occupying Lelechowka.

Major Mlynski set off into the forest with the battalion.

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The division never saw him or his men again. German prisoners stated subsequently that the battalion, with its commander, was wiped out in the attempt to hold up the 61st Bavarian Regiment. The division did not take the baggage-train with it. Colonel Prugar-Ketling knew what it would mean if he were to block his own road in such a situation.

The 49th Regiment was the first to pass along the forest road to Lelechowka. The 48th Regiment went by a parallel track. Behind them came the battalion of the 53rd Regiment as rear-guard. The three bodies of troops were moving along parallel lines, mutually supporting one another; or at least, so the Divisional Commander believed. But when he overtook the 49th Regiment he discovered that it was halted in a solid mass: it could not make its way through the baggage-wagons of the group.

A baggage-train two and a half miles in length extended along the narrow forest track, from which it was not possible to turn aside, and these accursed wagons were a positive nightmare to the division. Once more they had failed to execute orders, for they should have retreated through Wereszyca; but they clung together like burrs, and without even troubling to seek a suitable spot they parked themselves at the side of the road.

The night wore on. Even if Mlynski's battalion did not allow the 61st Bavarian Regiment to pass, German forces from the Lwow area might already be near Lelechowka if the 38th Division had not executed the order to secure the crossing. Behind us we could hear a violent cannonade in the direction of the cross-roads. What would happen in front of us if the infantry did not get through to the head of the line, or if the baggage-train came under German fire? Colonel Prugar-Ketling ordered that the artillery at least must hurry along the track, and that at

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least one battalion must make its way through the forest at the edge of the road along which the baggage-train was rumbling.

From the direction of Lelechowka came a furious rattle of automatics. Did this mean that the head of the baggage-train had driven clear of the forest?

Darkness fell. Stumbling, falling, bruising himself against the branches which lashed his face, the Divisional Commander ran on, with officers and men at his heels. Someone shouted and put out a hand in the darkness. It was the Chief of Staff, Colonel Popiel. He shouted that at least a handful of men should be assembled, and a blow struck immediately.

It grew lighter, but everything was lost in the dense mist of the dawn. We rallied some soldiers who were running past, and formed a little detachment of some two hundred bayonets. We fell again and again, and picked ourselves up for another spurt, and after covering a few hundred yards we passed the bulk of the troops. The Divisional Chaplain, Father Swiecicki, broke away from the group, stick in his hand, and ran on beside us with a ringing "Hurrah!" He was followed by a couple of officers from the Military Court and the Service Corps. The men, exhausted as they were, sprang up and rushed after the priest. We stormed into Lelechowka, where the Germans broke and fled rather than face a hand-to-hand fight. They retreated up a rise on the left of the village, and Colonel Nowak, who had managed to collect some men on his own account, prepared to strike at them. There was a considerable force of Germans on the hillside. Would his blow succeed? But there was no time to think about him; the road to Brzuchowice lay open for the moment, and we must pass before it closed again, for it led to Lwow. We dashed through Lelechowka, and crossed the rivulet beyond. On its steep bank we ran into strongly

held positions, but they proved to be held by our own men, members of the 38th Division.

On September 18th, having crossed the Wereszyca, General Sosnkowski pushed on towards Lwow with the rest of his forces. The remnants of the 24th Division, equal to one complete battalion, fought for the possession of Rzesna-Ruska.

But on the same day General Sosnkowski received by air a communication from the Supreme Command, dated September 17th, reporting that Bolshevik forces had crossed the frontier, and ordering him to retreat to the south and retire across the Hungarian frontier. Sosnkowski was beside himself with despair and rage. How could he retreat from the very gates of Lwow? But why was the city so silent, as though its defenders had abandoned it? And with what were the Poles to continue the struggle? Colonel Wir-Konas had succeeded in collecting no more than a third of his forces at Wereszyca, and even by the afternoon there was still no news of the 11th Division. The 24th Division had half taken Rzesna, and were demanding reinforcements, as they could get no farther. There was nothing surprising in this; but how were reinforcements to be obtained, when the crossing of the Wereszyca had to be held at least until the evening, so as to provide a basis of support for the 11th Division if it was still struggling through the forests on the farther side? General Sosnkowski regarded his best division as lost. The evening was drawing on, and with it the necessity of coming to a decision. He calculated how long it would take the Bolsheviks to reach Lwow, and pondered two alternatives. He must either resort to guerilla fighting, when, getting rid of all impedimenta, and, equipped only with automatics, anti-tank guns, and a small number of wagons, he would attempt to slip through to Lwow from the East, straight across country and through the forests;

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or else, if by some miracle the 11th Division should come through, he could make one last attempt to break through the German lines. But he had no news at all of the division, and in principle he had already chosen the first alternative, which led not southwards, but northwards. He accordingly informed his commanding officers of the situation and of the order which he had received from the Supreme Command, and gave the requisite instructions for a march to the Brzuchowice forest.

On that same day, September 18th, when General Sosnkowski was closing on Lwow, the first German aeroplane appeared over the city, but did not drop any bombs. It did, however, drop an aluminium container, to which a white and red flag was attached. The container was recovered and taken to the Lwow command. In it was found a letter from the German command. The Germans expressed their admiration of the valour of the defence, emphasized the fact that further resistance would be impossible, declared that soldierly honour had been satisfied, and proposed that the city should be surrendered, promising to leave the officers their arms. They gave them twenty-four hours for an answer; but the reply was given at once, in the form of increased fire. Next day, when an envoy rode up to one of the exits from the city, he was driven off.

At that time the Lwow defence already knew that the Bolsheviks were approaching, so that when General Sosnkowski broke through to Lwow they had already decided to surrender the city to the Russians.

Soon afterwards firing broke out on the eastern side of the city. The troops were firing at tanks which were approaching the barricade. Despite shouts to the effect that they were Bolshevik tanks, the troops at the barricades which closed the street continued their fire. The advancing forces made a demand for a parleyer. The

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Chief of Staff of the Lwow defence, Colonel Ruzinski, drove out to them. A Colonel Ivanow received him.

"What are you firing at us for?" the Russian demanded.

"Well, and what have you come into our country for?"

"To fight the Germans."

"Splendid! We'll draw up a plan for joint operations."

"Let us enter the city first."

"Well, I don't know . . ."

At that moment a hail of Polish rifle fire swept over their heads.

"D'you see how they're firing?" Colonel Ivanow snorted as he picked himself up. He was furious, all the more because the Polish officer had not followed his example.

"But what are they to do, if you're coming on . . ."

At that moment the Polish guns began to fire. Colonel Ivanow hurriedly took cover behind a hillock, and announced that the general in command would be arriving immediately. When at last the two commands met, the Polish commander being General Francis Sikorski, the Bolsheviks' naïve methods of approach were abandoned. The Soviet general was pleasant enough, but he demanded the surrender of the city. He solemnly guaranteed, however, that the armed garrison would be allowed to cross into Rumania, once the Polish defenders had laid down their arms.

In accordance with the agreement made, all the officers assembled on the spacious square. Hardly had they laid down their arms when they were surrounded by Russian troops. The Polish troops were amazed by the sight of these alien figures, with rifles at the ready, and their long triangular bayonets set. The Poles were surrounded and marched off. For four days they travelled without supplies, and for some unknown reason they were left even without

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water. They were transported from station to station, sent this way and that. At the country railway stations they jumped out of the trucks and tore up the roots from the unharvested gardens. Unknown hands thrust food at them at the halts, but how could such charity meet the needs of so many men?

My father, an insurgent of 1863, used to tell how the strings of prisoners, on their long march to Siberia, lived on the alms given them by kindly souls "in Christ's name." But seventy-five years have passed since then, and we had known twenty years of independence in our own beautiful country. Now once more the defenders of Poland were being driven eastwards. Beyond Husiatyn they were lost to us. What are they doing now? Where are they? How many of them are still alive?

## THE BATTLE OF BRZUCHOWICE

Colonel Prugar-Ketling was asleep in a hut in the village of Brzuchowice when General Sosnkowski came in and awakened him.

"I've let you sleep for two hours, Colonel. I'm sorry, but you must get up. We must make one more effort. Lwow is only just in front of us now."

"Very good, General!"

"How many men can you assemble?"

"How many? I'm afraid not many. . . . I can muster two weak infantry battalions and four incomplete batteries of artillery . . ."

"We'll begin the attack. You will lead it. You take over all that is left of the 24th Division."

"Very good, sir."

Colonel Prugar-Ketling roused the men, and they marched out of Brzuchowice. The Germans at once opened fire. Men were seen escaping through the forest.



They were soldiers detached from their formations; now no more than camp followers.

Colonel Hodala, who commanded both battalions, deployed his veterans and made his way through the mob of unofficered men, gathering many of them into his ranks as he went. The battalion on the right was commanded by Colonel Glowacki, that on the left by Major Litynski. General Sosnkowski remained in Brzuchowice. He had to muster the remnants of the 24th Division and send them off under Colonel Prugar-Ketling's orders as reinforcements for the attack. He had to direct the withdrawal of the remnants of the 38th Reserve Division, which the day before had suffered another bad mauling in heavy engagements on the eastern bank of the Wereszyca, and had now to screen Brzuchowice from the west, whence the main German pressure was coming. The retreat had to be carried out slowly, taking advantage of every scrap of cover to put up a temporary resistance. The many highroads and byroads leading to Brzuchowice had to be closed by detachments of the division. Finally, at the right moment the screen covering Brzuchowice from the west and the north-west had to be reduced to the minimum, when all available resources would be thrown into the fight for Lwow.

Night fell. Colonel Prugar-Ketling prepared the attack with great care, for he knew it was the last chance. It was to begin at midnight.

Glowacki's battalion, marching round Holosko from the south, ran into enemy fire. Knowing of General Sosnkowski's approach, the Germans had been reinforcing their positions here for the past seven days. Half of the veterans of the 11th Division perished, among them the brave commander of the seventh company of the 38th Regiment, Captain Jozef Josse, who by striking at Krzywca had flung the Germans back across the San,

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had captured a gun at Robozno, and had been wounded three times during the attack. With his head and arm bandaged, he had led his company to fresh victories at Bruchnal; in the Janow forest he had held the most threatened sector, and he had forced a passage at Lelechowska and in the Brzuchowice forest. Josse fell at Holosko, only a mile from Lwow, and almost at the end of the campaign, with a bullet in his leg, in his body, and finally in his heart. He was a fine soldier and a valiant commander. Other officers perished here too, and many of the rank and file, but their sacrifice was not wholly in vain: German resistance weakened, and our artillery smashed three tanks at point-blank range.

The Litynski battalion marched along the bridge to the north of the road. At first they had many casualties, but they fixed bayonets and charged. Soon their cheers faded in the distance. They had broken through. The Germans closed the breach, and Litynski's battalion was left on the other side. Later, in Rumania, I met the Chief of Staff of the Lwow Defence Army. He told me that Litynski got through with eighty bayonets. They were the only troops that reached Lwow.

The remnants of the 24th Division approached from Brzuchowice. Three battalions, each of some 150 men, really not more than a company. After them came reinforcements drawn from the 38th Reserve Division, and also three further battalions which were a little stronger, numbering perhaps two hundred rifles to the battalion. About 4 a.m. General Sosnkowski arrived.

The men were completely exhausted, but at the word of command they once more flung themselves into the attack. The Germans opened a murderous fire, and our losses were heavy. General Sosnkowski, rifle in his hand, took an active part in the battle; he personally commanded the reconnaissance, moving ahead of the lines of

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infantry; and once more we smashed the Germans, and the houses from which they had raked us with fire were captured.

Here the German resistance was exceptionally stubborn, for the enemy had either to hold up the Polish attack or perish. They could not retreat, still less surrender, after so many losses on either side. The defence were supported by tanks dug into the ground, which by the flanking fire of their guns and automatics played havoc with the leading ranks of our troops. We could not smash these armoured forts without artillery fire, since they were not visible from the front or from our observation posts. They had to be taken by sheer heroism. Sub-Lieutenant Schodowski, the commander of the fourth battery, was given the order to send one gun forward to these points of enemy fire. How could he send others to such a glorious death? He chose his gun, and took charge of it himself. At a gallop he drove through the line held by the infantry, unlimbered his gun, and himself directed its fire. Two German tanks were soon put out of action, but some of the gunners were shot down. Schodowski himself sighted the gun and fired it. Another tank was shattered. At that moment a German automatic opened fire, and Schodowski fell dead beside his gun; but the road had been opened and our infantry stormed the point and captured it. The fighting died down for a time, and the stretcher-bearers ran to the gun, rescuing the few wounded who were still breathing.

Suddenly German tanks appeared on our right flank. They opened fire on our troops with automatics at a distance of a hundred yards or so, inflicting heavy casualties. One of the Staff officers fell with a bullet in the temple. General Sosnkowski took over two anti-tank guns, and directed their fire. At Colonel Prugar-Ketling's side Colonel Morawski was in command of the anti-tank rifles. He bellowed like a bull as he reported his observa-

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tions, advising where a tank was likely to appear in a moment. Through the music of the battle we could hear him shout hoarsely, yet joyously: "A hit! A hit!"

When all the fire was directed against the tanks on our right flank, others appeared ahead of us. An officer dashed forward, without infantry protection, with a couple of anti-tank guns. He was wounded and a lieutenant was killed, but two more German tanks were put out of action. One of them was destroyed by a non-commissioned officer at a distance of about ten yards. Altogether we smashed fourteen tanks at this point.

The Germans were still amazingly firm and stubborn. We could not smother their curtain of fire, which came from nests cleverly concealed among the wooded slopes dominating the exit of the main road. The stretcher-bearers could not manage to remove all the wounded, and on every side there were groans and cries for help. The situation was rendered more difficult by the enemy's ruthlessness: two stretcher-bearers who advanced into the open to remove several wounded fell dead under the fire of automatics. Two particularly troublesome tanks had taken up positions among the bushes on a rise to the left of the road, and with their flanking fire they held up our advance. Since early morning they had resisted all our attempts to smash them or to move along the road, or to the right of it, with the murderous close-range fire of their automatics and mortars. They would have to be dealt with, for the enemy had now reoccupied the group of houses from which we had previously driven them out. General Sosnkowski gave orders that at a given moment one more battalion of the 38th Division was to be brought up. Now only one weak battalion was left in Brzuchowice as a rearguard, holding the south-western outskirts.

Colonel Wir-Konas suggested that one of the officers of the 38th Division was a specialist in dealing with tank

nests. This officer was given the order to capture the rise that concealed the troublesome tanks. The attempt was fruitless; the company which charged up the rising ground had to retire with heavy losses. The captain himself was wounded in the neck.

General Sosnkowski then ordered a systematic artillery preparation with howitzers and heavy batteries. First the further tank nests must be covered; then the range was to be shortened, and then again lengthened, in order to enable our infantry to move up. We had not a single observation post from which the observer was not immediately driven out by flanking fire at close range. Our artillery fired more or less by guesswork, but it put down a heavy barrage which appeared to be effective. The barbed wire was torn away, and the infantry could see no answering fire from the slope, so it only remained to agree with the artillery as to the moment for attack.

At this critical phase Captain Dudzinski, the officer who had taken charge of the communications company at Przemyśl, half of which had fallen in the forest at Janów, while the rest was disposed of during the days that followed, ran up to the infantry with the order relating to the charge. If the actual commander of the Polish front was fighting rifle in hand, it was only right that the communications officer should himself carry orders to the troops. Captain Dudzinski conveyed the order, and fell dead.

His sacrifice was in vain, for now, from the rear, an attack of massed tanks was made against our artillery.

Our artillery swung round against the tanks. It is necessary to realize what such a manoeuvre implies. It is a slow operation pitted against speed and manoeuvrability. But this attack also was shattered, and here too the enemy lost several tanks. But the infantry, which went forward again, was deprived of artillery support. It could do

nothing against that iron fist: it broke up, it dissolved. Now there were hardly any Polish forces left to strike along the main line of attack.

The evening was drawing on. From the rear came reports that the Germans had occupied the entire district, that strong patrols of the enemy were approaching our artillery positions through the forest. One more attempt! The senior officers took the lead: General Sosnkowski, General Lukowski, Colonels Prugar-Ketling, Szwarcenburg-Czerny, Wir-Konas, Morawski, Demel and Wisniowski: then the rest of the Staff officers, and a handful of soldiers. They advanced, taking every advantage of the terrain, finding cover behind every rise in the ground and in the roadside ditches. Suddenly automatics rattled overhead on the left, mortars thundered, and heavy shells struck the road with a fearful crash. Several men fell to the ground. No, there was no way through. Now the end had come.

"General, you slip through alone. Lwow is waiting."

"I cannot go on without troops. We shall fight as we fought in 1863." General Sosnkowski had assembled the remnants of the division for a last attempt.

"We shall not surrender. We'll try to strike straight across through the forests and fields, leaving the roads where necessary, passing round the German positions at Lwow and getting into the city from the East. It may be that the Bolsheviks haven't yet succeeded in besieging Lwow from that side. If we fail, we'll go off to the South and wage guerilla war, breaking up into groups. We'll collect all the officers and men, and take with us the necessary number of anti-tank guns and automatics. We'll destroy everything else. We won't take any wagons with us. The soldiers are worn out with lack of sleep and exhaustion. We'll go in twos, holding one another's coat-tails, to keep contact in the darkness in the forest. We'll

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take a guide. The vanguard will be provided by the 11th Division under Colonel Szymanski with the guide; immediately behind the vanguard the senior officers and the Staff. The other officers will go with the men. We'll get the men together. There may be seven hundred, or possibly eight hundred of us in all. We'll destroy the guns."

The point of assembly was decided upon: a small wood. There several hundred of our wounded were lying in sheds and in an open glade. We left them in the care of two doctors and the stretcher-bearers, who were to wait for the Germans. We waited a long while on the road above the wood for the men to assemble and the column to form up.

Then we set off into the forest and the night, holding one another's hands in order to keep contact. The long dark line quietly seeped into the forest, winding along a narrow track; but the head of the column immediately turned aside. Now we were going straight ahead. Not a thing could be seen. Somewhere in the forest rifle bullets were crashing through the trees: the tank nests we knew so well were firing from our rear and flank, dropping mortar shells on the road. Evidently they had not yet discovered our retirement, and were expecting a night attack. We stumbled over stumps and roots of trees. I heard General Sosnkowski call in a muffled voice to the head of the advance-guard: "Slower, slower, damn it!" It was no use: the guide continued to rush onwards with long, rapid strides.

The advance-guard broke away and vanished in the darkness. Only the last man was left, clutching the hand of Colonel Morawski. The column halted, completely lost. Questions were nervously asked from the rear. General Sosnkowski gave the order: "Keep where you are; we must wait for Colonel Szymanski; he's sure to return to

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look for the lost column." Unfortunately, the men who were following behind the group of commanders continued to press on. The line was broken up. In the darkness we heard the neighing of horses, which were trampling on the men in the general confusion. Several electric torches began to flash, and at once anxious voices called: "Who's switching that light on? Put it out, damn you!" To cap everything, the heavens opened their floodgates. The rain was torrential, and I could feel streams of water flowing down my back behind my collar. General Sosnkowski ordered: "There's no sense in going on; assemble the men; we must decide where we are."

Unfortunately, in the darkness there was no way of stopping the onward movement of the rear of the column. Inevitably we broke up into groups. About four hundred men gathered around the senior officers and the Staff. The feeling of strain was intensified; the men were worn out, exhausted even to the point of suffering from hallucinations. Some said: "There's no point in waiting; we must go on; anything's better than waiting!" General Sosnkowski was silent: evidently he realized that in such a situation the first thing to do was to wait until the men were calmer. At last he spoke: "I've been mentally reckoning how much sleep I've had during the last ten days and nights: I make it eighteen hours. Yes, we must go on. Who is familiar with this district?"

A lieutenant undertook to guide the column by compass. We began a terrible, tormenting march, straight ahead, through the undergrowth and the clearings, through the streams, through deep ravines.

The stout-hearted lieutenant coped with his task: we went wrong more than once, but at last we emerged from the forest into the open. We were moving along a line parallel with the German front, outside Lwow, and immediately in the rear of the enemy. On our right,



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approximately a thousand yards away, we saw the wavering light of rockets and the flash of guns; they seemed to be firing all along the front, and we heard also the rattle of single automatics. I had the impression that the Germans had given the alarm. We reached a group of lonely cottages, and there we were able to ascertain our whereabouts. We took a guide, and asked where the Germans were. Male Grzybowice was not yet occupied, so we went forward. The column slowly melted away, growing shorter at every halt. The men were dropping with weariness; they no longer cared about anything; they simply turned aside in order to get a little sleep.

In Wielkie Grzybowice a group of shadowy figures suddenly fled in alarm before our column. A German patrol? God only knew; and none of us bothered to inquire. We were indifferent to everything; we stumbled along like automata, only half conscious, with but one thought: Lwow. Only after a while did I notice that General Sosnkowski, General Lukowski and Colonel Demel were no longer among us, and that the column had grown amazingly short. Fortunately, after fifteen minutes they overtook us. One indignant officer protested to no one in particular: "How could you leave your commander behind, and abandon him like that? It's the limit, it's not soldierly, it's——" The rough, angry voice of a superior officer interrupted him, and a noisy dispute arose, ended only by General Sosnkowski himself.

We reached Dublany and halted before the first cottage with a light in it. I looked back over the column: it seemed to me that there were not more than a hundred and fifty of us left. The Staff went indoors; for myself, I dropped into a roadside ditch and fell asleep. Someone pulled at my sleeve: "Colonel, we're going on. Hurry up, time's flying!"

We set off at a sharp pace, but after a mile or so

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someone asked: "Where's General Sosnkowski?" We could not see the General, and we halted. Had we again abandoned the commander who had come to share our good and evil fortune with us? Another voice asked feverishly: "And where's Father Swiecicki? The chaplain's missing." We waited a little longer, but it was beginning to grow light. There was nothing to be done; we must go on; we might be overheard . . .

We never saw again those who were left behind at Dublany, for in the light of dawn a body of cavalry loomed up some fifty paces ahead of us. It was a regiment of Soviet cavalry in field quarters, surrounded by machine-guns.

Some troopers rode out to meet us. One was waving a white rag on his sabre. "Friends . . ." But a string of horsemen, moving across the fields, was already making a half-circle around us. General Lukowski parleyed with them. Of course they would let us pass, they declared. They were friends. General Lukowski and Colonel Wir-Konas got into a car. Colonel Prugar-Ketling and Captain de Ville, a very stout-hearted officer of the Divisional Staff, the only one who was left alive and well, quietly slipped behind the soldiers and were engulfed among them. A group of our men came forward irresolutely. The Soviet commanders gave orders that they were not to be bound. After all, they had been forced to fight by their dread of their Polish lords! Our soldiers of the 11th Division!

A crowd of soldiers was sacking a house. Uniforms were replaced by civilian rags. "Colonel," some of our Ukrainian soldiers said, "don't go in there! Don't you see what's happening in there? They'll murder you. We're Ukrainians; you'll get through with us!" I went with them. I left the village dressed as a beggar, a member of a shattered army, seeking protection among Ukrainian

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peasants. One of them halted for a moment, gazed at me, and said, in a tone of dull misery:

"I had to destroy my automatic myself. It had fought so well . . ."

That is how the 11th Carpathian Infantry Division fought under the command of General Sosnkowski. That is how its officers, non-commissioned officers, riflemen and artillerymen fulfilled their hard, soldierly duty. Even the Staff orderlies and the men of the auxiliary services took their places in the front line when an attack was to be made. Not a man tried to shirk the battle; not one of them all left the field without orders, unless he was seriously wounded. Even those who were sent to hospital escaped when their wounds were only partially healed, to make their way back by night, through the woods and forests, to their detachments, in order to fight on. Many of them reached France with their unhealed wounds still bandaged.

The soil of Poland was steeped in their blood. In a few days and nights of fighting the casualties suffered by this one infantry division ran into thousands.

I remember a grey dawn in Lwow before the war. . . . Before the war. . . . Before which war? Before the war that was fought under another flag. And again, to-day, a foreign flag flies over Poland. . . . I remember the ranks of the legionaries, and the taut figure of Sosnkowski, when he stepped out before the future soldiers, drawn up in a straggling line. History has travelled a full circle.

"If I had found just one more 11th Division at Przemyśl," General Sosnkowski said to Colonel Prugar-Ketling, when they met in France a few weeks later, "I could have opened the road to Lwow."

# MY FIRST THREE DAYS

*by* LIEUTENANT J. S.  
of the Bydgoszcz District Office  
*as told to* JERZY POMIAN



## II

### MY FIRST THREE DAYS

#### THE FIGHT AGAINST THE FIFTH COLUMN IN POLAND

THE outbreak of war found me in Bydgoszcz. For several days we had been making feverish preparations for mobilization, and had reckoned with the possibility that war would burst upon us at any moment; but even so the morning of September 1st took us by surprise. The first news of the invasion came from the neighbouring district of Sempolno, whose Governor only just succeeded in escaping, with the more important archives, from the German armoured patrols which had occupied the town. We received this news by telephone at five o'clock in the morning, and immediately went to the office of the Provincial Government at Torun. At the same time the District Governor of Bydgoszcz issued instructions for completing the mobilization.

The large district of Bydgoszcz, which with its chief town had over 230,000 inhabitants, had barely 120 regular police, and some 300 auxiliary police, drawn from the local population, who had been mobilized the previous day. These forces were all that were available for the maintenance of security in the town and district until the Army was mobilized, and for rounding up the numerous German agents, who, owing to the conciliatory policy of the Polish Government, had been merely kept under observation. On the morning of September 1st the police proceeded to arrest persons suspected of co-operating with the enemy. As was to be expected, a number of German agents known to the police either went into hiding or fled.

Even so, over five hundred persons were arrested. The arrests were carried out in perfect order : no one attempted resistance, and there was no need to apply harsh measures. The prisoners were concentrated in a previously prepared building. They were to be sent by train, in accordance with instructions, to an assembly point at Wroclawek, whence they were to be transferred farther into the heart of Poland.

The first German raid occurred at seven in the morning. At the time I was in the office of the county prefect, where I was engaged with him in decoding the instructions of the Government. The bombs fell several hundred yards away. They were less impressive than I had expected, and the prefect, who had gone through the last war with me, said that the enemy were using only light bombs, 100-pounders at most. When the raiders had passed we drove into the town, in order to ascertain the damage and issue the necessary orders. A number of houses close to the railway station had been wrecked, and there were many killed and wounded. The mayor of the town, Leon Barciszewski, who has since died, set about the work of organizing first-aid assistance, while the prefect and I went back to our task of dealing with the mobilization orders. In the afternoon the prefect took a few hours off to inspect the county, and took me with him. We drove in an open car, turning off the main road at times to visit places where the commissions entrusted with the mobilization of the horses were at work, or calling in at district centres to see how the general mobilization was proceeding. The mobilization orders were already posted everywhere, and individual calling-up notices had been issued. The men called up were crowding along the roads to Bydgoszcz, although many of the villages and sections of the main road were visited that same day by German bombers. Along all the main roads leading to the German frontier, some thirty-

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seven miles distant, troops were marching to resist the invasion. These roads were repeatedly attacked by enemy aeroplanes, which raked them with machine-gun fire. I witnessed one such attack. The troops replied with their rifles, and here and there heavy machine-guns were hurriedly set up. Several times that day I found myself under fire, and I was amazed by the splendid discipline with which the young Polish recruits stood up to it, and even more by the coolness of the civilian population, and the men who were hurrying along the roads to report to the military headquarters at Bydgoszcz.

At the little town of Koronow, in the county of Bydgoszcz, we heard the first news of the battles near Tuchola, on the front. There we met a Staff officer of one of the infantry divisions, who was returning with a despatch. He told the prefect that in spite of the surprise attack, and the enormous preponderance of the enemy tanks and artillery, all the sections of his division were still in action close to the frontier. In Koronow we could hear the distant sound of gunfire. The town had already been bombed twice during that first day. The prefect gave instructions as to what was to be done if the enemy should approach, and we returned to Bydgoszcz.

During our absence the Germans had carried out another raid, which had almost completely destroyed the great railway junction of Bydgoszcz. This held up the movement of the troop trains, and prevented the despatch by rail of the arrested German agents. We had orders to send them on foot in the direction of Inowroclaw, until transport was available.

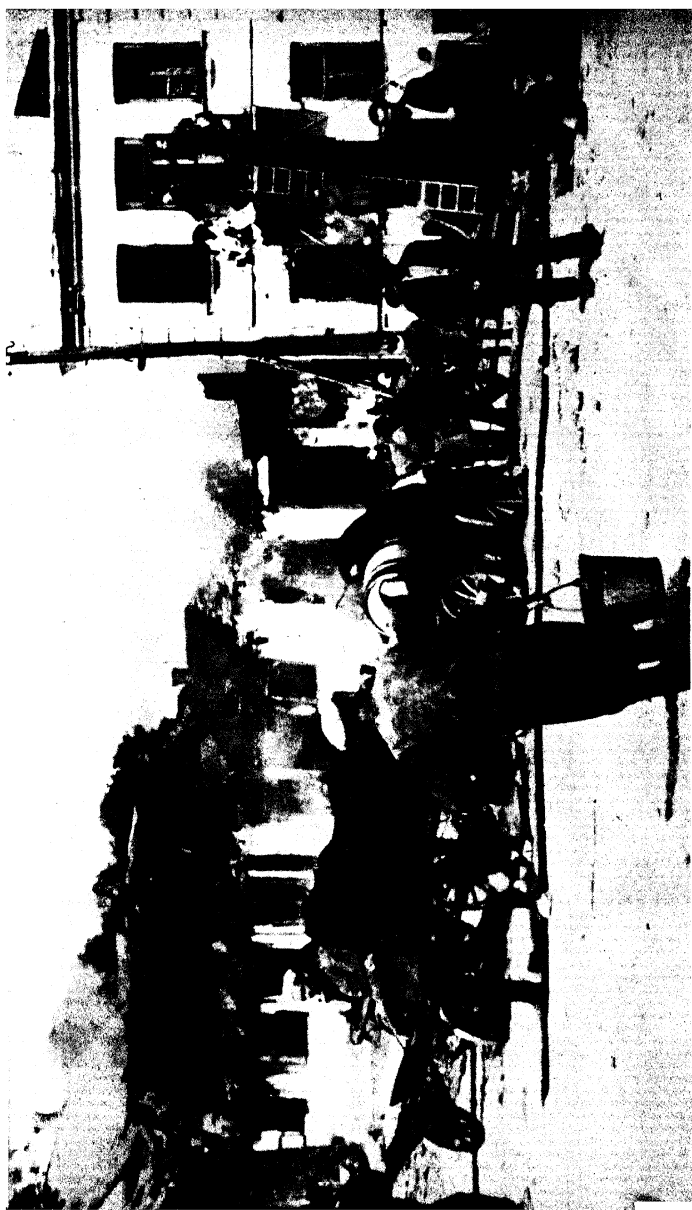
At about nine in the evening the first large-scale movement of refugees, escaping in their carts from the county of Sempolno, which the Germans had occupied that morning, began to pass through Bydgoszcz. The people of our town gave them a sympathetic welcome,



providing them with food and shelter for the night. They told us how the Germans had brutally driven them out of their villages, giving them only a few minutes' respite. They had packed all their scanty possessions into their carts, and some were driving one or two cows or other livestock.

On this first day the refugees' carts were not so numerous, but by the following day they had increased to thousands, and were seriously impeding the movement of the Polish troops toward the front. The Germans knew what they were doing when they ordered the evacuation of the Polish frontier villages, and we dimly realized their intentions; but at that time we did not guess in what other way this mass wandering of the people would be exploited by the enemy. We felt heartily sorry for the refugees, and both the authorities and the civilian population did all they could for them. In order to keep communications open we merely directed them along the side roads, and the task of controlling the exodus absorbed the services of a large proportion of the police.

During the night disturbing news began to arrive from the northern parts of the county. About one in the morning a terrified official arrived from Koronow to tell us that the Germans were shelling the town. Wishing to avoid panic, and also to check the news, which seemed incredible, the prefect tried to ring up the police at Koronow. Since he failed to get through, we decided to drive in the direction of the town. The assistant prefect and several other officials remained to deal with the new instructions and fresh reports. Some twelve miles outside Bydgoszcz we met a group of cyclists, who proved to be the prison guard from Koronow. They explained that the enemy was already approaching the town, but the prefect made them return, pointing out that they were breaking regulations by leaving the prison without a guard. When



THE LOCAL FIRE BRIGADE AT WORK AFTER THE BOMBING OF A DEFENCELESS POLISH VILLAGE

[KeyStone]



THE ROAD FROM WARSAW

## MY FIRST THREE DAYS

we drove into Koronow we saw that the alarm was premature; but the town was already being shelled by light artillery. The detachments of Polish troops who were in the town stated that the shells were coming from beyond a line of lakes, some three miles distant, and that there was no immediate threat to the town, although several people had been killed and wounded. The prefect gave instructions for the organization of a civic guard from among the local population to assist in the supervision of the prison, in which there were still many unevacuated criminals.

About three in the morning, having got through to Bydgoszcz on the telephone, we set out on the return journey. We had some difficulty en route with the guards posted by a Polish division which was moving up to the front, but our documents and my uniform were sufficient credentials. I had been mobilized two days previously as a lieutenant of infantry, and had been appointed liaison officer between my chief, the prefect of Bydgoszcz, and the command of that sector of the front.

At Bydgoszcz the atmosphere was disquieting. Despite the reassuring news which we brought from Koronow, the fact that in a single day the enemy had covered almost twenty-five miles between that town and the frontier had made a deep impression. It was impossible to conceal the news from the people, who had learnt it from the refugees. There was still worse news from the direction of Swiecie, a place almost forty miles from the frontier—that is, as far from it as Bydgoszcz—which was said to have been evacuated, or even captured by the German advance detachments. This seemed difficult to believe, and we took serious steps to prevent the spreading of the rumours.

The prefect had made contact with the military command of the sector, but he could not give us any more exact information. The General in command had only

asked him to drive at once to Staff Headquarters, with a view to discussing methods of combating sabotage and defeatist activities. When we arrived it appeared that in many localities inhabited by Germans of Polish citizenship military communications had been cut.

The Polish military authorities demanded the immediate intervention of the police and a strict investigation. It was necessary to organize detachments of police to go out to these localities, some of which were situated close to the shifting front line. When in the morning these police detachments returned, they reported that among the Germans permanently living there and in the county of Bydgoszcz, and comprising some 20 per cent of the population, unknown individuals had appeared, and that these were carrying on "diversionist" activities and endeavouring to persuade the Germans, especially the younger men, many of whom were pro-Hitler in their sympathies, to co-operate with them. In the majority of cases these efforts had failed, and the German inhabitants themselves gave up the "diversionists." The police managed to arrest a number of them and bring them to Bydgoszcz, where they were held for trial by a field court-martial, which was to be organized next morning.

These first signs of "diversionist" activity passed without arousing much attention. From all parts of the county, from mayors and local authorities, we received reassuring news. The German inhabitants were everywhere behaving correctly, and everywhere civic guards were being organized among the population, in accordance with that morning's instructions. In Bydgoszcz itself, where only 8 per cent of the inhabitants were Germans, the spirit was excellent. The people believed profoundly in the final victory of the Polish Army. They had no conception as yet of the danger which threatened them from the front.

## MY FIRST THREE DAYS

The bombing of the town had had the effect of intensifying their patriotism and their readiness for the war rather than that of spreading panic. No one had any thought of sabotage. The police were feeling anxious in respect of the few German agents whom they had failed to round up. As to the mass of the German inhabitants, the police felt confident of their loyalty and, for that matter, in face of the great numerical preponderance of Poles in the town, they did not for a moment consider it possible that any serious anti-Polish activities could develop. None the less, and although instructions had been given five days previously to relieve the Germans of all firearms, the prefect gave orders for the organization of a citizen guard, consisting of men who had had military training but were not yet called up, to assist the police. This guard was unarmed.

The next morning passed quietly enough. Only about noonday did panicky news begin to arrive from the little town of Fordon, some thirteen miles from Bydgoszcz, on a crossing of the River Vistula. German aeroplanes had already made two attacks on the great railway bridge at this spot, so far without effect. The second series of bombs had fallen on houses close to the bridge. There had been very many killed and wounded, and there was a shortage of first-aid dressings and medical assistance. We immediately organized a rescue expedition. The prefect himself accompanied several doctors and cars filled with surgical materials, and I, who during those days was constantly in attendance on him, went with him.

At Fordon the situation was truly infernal. On the cliffs and the embankment close to the bridge police detachments and battalions of the frontier guards were concealed, acting as anti-aircraft forces. But they had only a couple of machine-guns, which were ineffective against the armoured German bombers. Many of the soldiers and

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police had been wounded, but they remained at their posts. A little farther from the bridge, towards the town, bombs had hit buildings, killing several persons and wounding scores of others. The one local doctor and several women were doing what they could to tackle the situation. The groans of the wounded, many of them with legs or arms torn off, were terrible to hear. Our doctors hastened to help the victims, while the prefect and I made an inspection of the defensive posts.

We had hardly finished our inspection, and had just dropped down from the Vistula embankment, when a new wave of aeroplanes flew over. They were dive-bombers, each of which dived towards the bridge and dropped a bomb. Several of these bombs fell in the water, exploding with a deafening roar; one landed quite near us, bespattering us with sand. We just managed to fling ourselves to the ground before further bombs fell upon the bridge and broke it in two. The effect was terrific. I had never pictured a bombing attack on so great a scale. I was filled with admiration for a machine-gun nest quite close to us, which never ceased its fire for a moment, although, unfortunately, this was without effect. When the raid had ended the prefect went to this post to congratulate the men on their discipline. They proved to be freshly mobilized auxiliary police, all of them veterans of the 1914-18 war. Fortunately, not one of them was wounded. Nor were there any casualties among the doctors and the medical personnel, but there were men killed on the bridge, which was a melancholy picture, with two of its spans shattered and dangling in the water.

On our return to Bydgoszcz more alarming reports began to come in. Koronow had been occupied by German troops, fighting was going on for Swiecie, and the district authorities of Trzeciewiec, some nineteen miles to the north-east of Bydgoszcz, reported German

## MY FIRST THREE DAYS

patrols in the vicinity. We checked all these reports with the military, and they all proved to be true.

The whole of that day—Saturday, September 2nd—was occupied with the further mobilization and the organization of the local authorities to meet the war situation. Meanwhile other officials were busily packing the archives of the prefecture and preparing them for evacuation, as it was intended to send them, together with part of the county personnel, outside the war zone. This was finally done, with some difficulty, at about four o'clock in the afternoon. Three heavily loaded motor-buses set off with some of our colleagues and members of our families. There was no time for farewell, and no accommodation for personal effects. After this partial evacuation only a dozen or so of the county officials were left. These constituted the personnel of the prefecture.

The prefect ordered a similar semi-evacuation of the municipal offices in the town of Bydgoszcz. The technical personnel and essential members of the public services were to remain in the town, while all other officials had for the time being to proceed to Inowroclaw and there wait for further instructions.

The evening brought a critical intensification of the situation. The prefect, who had several times visited the military staff of that sector, informed us that the General in command had had no time to talk to him, as he was continually issuing orders. The whole of the Bydgoszcz infantry division was in action. The battle was being waged some ten to twelve miles from the town. The Polish troops, who had had no relief whatever, were growing very tired, while the enemy was continually throwing new forces into the battle. According to the Divisional Commander, the enemy's superiority in mechanized power was beyond belief; but the Polish troops were holding



their positions against wave after wave of tanks and dive-bombers.

About midnight of September 2nd-3rd the Divisional Commander informed us that we must count on the possible surrender of the town within the next few hours. At one o'clock in the morning the General commanding the front, Bortnowski, arrived at Bydgoszcz, and the prefect, as civil commissioner, reported to him and received instructions. In his brief conversation with the prefect the Commander described the situation in terms similar to those used by the Divisional Commander, and informed him that the authorities must be ready for a temporary surrender of the town to the enemy. He did not indicate any time for the surrender, but gave it to be understood that it might be a matter of days or hours. It must be added that all of us believed this to be a purely temporary measure; not only the civilian authorities but the military also. We regarded it as a frontier retirement made under enemy pressure, in order to give the main forces of the Polish Army time to prepare a counter-offensive. So we did not regard the incident as a terrible tragedy.

All that night we were driving about the town and that part of the county which was not yet directly involved in war operations. In some parts of the county we could not even hear the sound of artillery or machine-guns. Very occasionally reports came in of acts of sabotage, but only of isolated instances, for the most part of the cutting of military telephone wires. Although it was our fifth night without sleep (for we had spent the nights preceding the outbreak of war in giving effect to the mobilization orders), we were so excited that we were not conscious of fatigue. But about five in the morning the prefect ordered a short period of rest, each of us taking his turn. We slept in the prefect's house, which was now

the headquarters of his staff. A telephone stood by the bed, connecting us with the exchange. Our sleep was continually interrupted by telephone calls from Warsaw and Torun, asking for information on the military situation, or issuing orders.

At about eight in the morning a message arrived which renewed our flagging energies: the Divisional Commander had reassuring news for us. Affairs had taken such a turn at the front that for the time being Bydgoszcz was no longer threatened. Certain of our forces had made a counter-attack, and there was even talk of recapturing Koronow. We were all delighted and buoyed up with the highest hopes. We began our normal work in the office, the prefect and I in rooms on the first storey, while the others were on the ground-floor. About nine o'clock the mayor called on us, with the chairman of the National Party, Conrad Fiedler. We had already telephoned them the reassuring news which we had received from the army. We discussed certain details of administration, and then our visitors went on to the municipal offices.

A few minutes after they had left the sound of machine-guns broke out, quite unexpectedly and very close to the prefecture. Several guns were at work, firing burst after burst. Before we could take any steps to discover what was happening one of the officials from the ground-floor rushed up the stairs, white as a sheet, and reported that German tanks were only a hundred yards away, in Gdansk Street. One glance out of the window was sufficient to reveal the panic which prevailed in the street. Military baggage-wagons were being driven off as fast as the horses could gallop; cars and lorries were crowding on one another, all making for the bridge over the Brda. There was no need to ask further questions. We ran down to our car, which was waiting, and drove off, doing our best to avoid the throng of refugees by following side

## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

streets. We crossed the bridge over the River Brda, which runs through the middle of the town, and halted in the spacious square on the farther side. From a school close by the prefect managed to get into contact with the Divisional Commander by telephone. The Staff had already heard what was happening in Bydgoszcz, but they declared that there could not be any German troops in the town, and that the firing must be the work of "diversionists."

Obviously the panic had to be stopped at once, and the "diversionists" crushed. Meanwhile the bridge over the river, and the square in which we had halted, were crowded with the people fleeing from the town. The firing was still continuous, and it seemed as though a battle were being fought on the farther side of the bridge.

We hastily took measures to halt the departing baggage-wagons. With the aid of a few soldiers and several young civilians we succeeded in stopping three carts and blocking the narrow street which was the main exit to the square. In this way the whole stream of refugees was brought to a halt. We at once ran from wagon to wagon, calling on the men to pull themselves together. They soon became calm and ready to obey our commands. We left a driver in charge of each wagon, and assembled the rest of the soldiers along the street. In this way we managed to collect some two hundred men armed with rifles. Meanwhile officers sent out by the Divisional Staff rode up on motor-cycles, and a few police also arrived. The forces thus assembled were divided into two detachments, and under the command of two of the officers and two police commissioners they were marched back to the bridge, in order to suppress the "diversionists." Although firing could still be heard, the panic had completely subsided, for everybody now knew that there were no German

troops, but only the "diversionists." The initial confusion was replaced by fury.

After organizing and despatching these forces, we made a short tour of inspection through the districts on the left bank of the river. On the highroad to Inowroclaw we met the Mayor of Bydgoszcz, Leon Barciszewski. The mayor, a man getting on in years, was not equal to coping with the conditions that prevailed in the town, and after some discussion it was decided that he should go to Inowroclaw, whence he could be summoned by telephone if necessary.

As we parted a German fighter plane was making an attack on the highroad, diving and raking the road and the forest with machine-gun fire. An anti-aircraft battery nearby fired round after round at it. From the first day of the war we had carried short cavalry carbines in the car. We snatched them up, and taking cover behind the trees by the roadside, we did our best to hit the machine. But all previous practice in pheasant-shooting was of little use to us now, and the great "bird" flew off untouched.

After driving round the district of Kujawy we went back to the centre of the town. Here there was fighting in every street. The "diversionists" were more numerous than we had expected. They were firing with light machine-guns from many of the houses, from church towers, and from factory buildings. The bullets ricocheted with a whistle off the road surface and the walls of the houses. One hit the mudguard of our car. But already we could see how audacious had been this attempt at pro-German "diversion." The people of Bydgoszcz were spontaneously joining the soldiers, and with them they were capturing house after house, the "diversionists" being either shot in the course of the struggle or executed on the spot. Every point which was a "diversionist"

stronghold was surrounded by crowds of troops, police and civilian guards.

We drove through the town in an open car. Our chauffeur, a policeman who had been a soldier in the 1914-18 war, behaved splendidly, driving slowly through the quieter streets, in order to enable the prefect to see what was happening, and speeding up in the more dangerous sectors, but never allowing himself to be flurried. In this way we drove through heavy fire to the Divisional Staff headquarters in Foch Street. I remained in the car, where I experienced one of the most unpleasant moments of the day. Bullets were whistling all around us. I realized that they were fired from a distance, and were not intended for me, but all the same they made me feel very uncomfortable. I did my best to look calm, knowing that I was under the observation of several military drivers as well as my own completely calm and smiling police driver. The prefect spent about half an hour with the Staff, and during his stay stray bullets broke three windows in the building. Moreover, a German aeroplane dropped some incendiary bombs in the neighbourhood. Several of these were put out at once, and many others failed to ignite.

When we left the Staff and continued our drive round the town we found that the struggle had changed in character. Almost all the nests of the "diversionists" had been captured. Firing was going on only in the suburbs, and Polish forces were sent out to deal with it. By his intervention the prefect managed to save several of the "diversionists" from immediate death, giving orders for them to be escorted to the field court-martial, which was already operating close to the Divisional Staff headquarters.

I was astonished to see how few of the captured Germans were natives of Bydgoszcz. Our own police, who knew

Bydgoszcz perfectly, stated that only an insignificant number of the "diversionists" were of local origin, and investigations showed that the great majority of them had come from Germany. They were Gestapo agents and German soldiers, all dressed alike. They were all dressed in the style affected by Poles living abroad, but taken in the mass they were compromisingly alike, so that it was obvious with whom we had to deal.

Our investigations disclosed that the *putsch* had been caused by "diversionist" detachments which had made their way into Bydgoszcz, some of them amidst the stream of refugees whom we had received so hospitably on the previous day, while others had been dropped by parachute at dusk on the previous evening, in forest glades within easy reach of the town. Part of the German minority in the town had also been guilty of co-operating with the "diversionists," mainly by concealing spies and indicating the points from which they could make their attack. The firing was almost entirely the work of the imported "diversionists," who had used light machine-guns of the latest German type, which they had brought with them concealed in sacks among the food supplies which they carried on their carts.

The hurried examination to which we submitted the men showed that they had been ordered to cause a "rising of the German population of Bydgoszcz" punctually at ten o'clock in the morning. They had been promised the support of German tanks by eleven o'clock, but this help did not arrive at all that day, so that the *putsch* was completely crushed in a couple of hours, and order was restored in the town by six o'clock in the evening. According to the reports of both the military and the civil authorities the number of the killed on both sides did not exceed five hundred.

The arrested "diversionists," of whom there were

several dozen altogether, were handed over to a field court-martial. I learned next day that they had confessed that their roles had been carefully prepared long before the war; they had been taught Polish, and made to memorize details of the district in which they were to work, attending special schools for this purpose. They had also been taught the means of communication by signals and secret signs, and all the rest of the stock-in-trade of the "diversionist." Similar German schools existed for those destined for other countries neighbouring on Germany, and above all for France.

Although the street fighting and the necessity of suppressing the *putsch* at the cost of bloodshed had greatly perturbed us, we were in good heart. By 6 p.m. the entire "diversionist" activity was at an end. There was complete order in the centre of the town. Isolated shots could be heard in the suburbs, and especially from the neighbourhood of the Kujawski forest, whence "diversionists," probably parachutists, were firing on the roads running to Inowroclaw and Solec. The prefect entrusted the reinforcements and additions to the civil militia to a leading citizen of Bydgoszcz who had particularly distinguished himself in the day's fighting. The militia was to be armed by the military authorities and was to take its orders from the town commander. By six-thirty we were discussing the question of its organization, and other matters affecting the security of the town, with the command of the division defending Bydgoszcz.

We now felt sure that all thought of surrendering the town had been abandoned and that the situation was improving, so that a telephone message from the Divisional Command to the prefect at seven-thirty came like a thunderbolt. In a broken and weary voice the General informed us that the General in command of the front had issued the order to abandon the town. We should

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prepare to leave Bydgoszcz and warn the local branch of the Polish Bank and the municipal authorities. Wishing to avert panic and a mass flight of the inhabitants, he advised us to regard this information as secret; or the forces now being withdrawn from the front, most of which would pass through Bydgoszcz, would not be able to make their way through the blocked streets and highway. The General's voice sounded so different that the prefect, fearing that some trick might have been played upon us, asked to be put through to the Staff again. But the news was confirmed. We could only obey the order.

Our preparations to evacuate the town took a couple of hours. We left the prefecture, which was situated on the bank of the River Brda nearer to the enemy, shortly after nine. Our artillery had already withdrawn from the town, and sappers were preparing to blow up the bridges over the river. It was about five in the morning before we could leave that part of the town which lay on the right bank. The enemy was already in the forest which extended as far as the outskirts of Bydgoszcz, and only small detachments of the rearguard were holding him back. After three days of superhuman exertions we were forced to abandon the town just at the moment when the hard fight against the German Fifth Column had been won and it seemed that its safety was assured. More than one of us left behind his home, his people, and all that he possessed. Yet we did not despair. We all believed at the time that our withdrawal would be only a matter of a few days, and that we should soon return to Bydgoszcz together with the victorious Polish troops.





IN BELEAGUERED WARSAW

The war diary of  
COLONEL L.

*edited by* F. B. CZARNOMSKI





THE FIGHT FOR WARSAW IS OVER, SEPTEMBER 1939



WARSAW BURNING, SEPTEMBER 1939

### III

## IN BELEAGUERED WARSAW

THE story of the siege and defence of the City of Warsaw and the name of its heroic Lord Mayor, Stefan Starzynski, will be remembered as long as men shall strive and fight for liberty. In the following pages part of that story is told by one of its defenders, Colonel L. of the Warsaw Defence Command, who after the capture of the city escaped to Cracow, crossed the Carpathian Mountains into Hungary, and thence made his way to France, to rejoin the Polish Army under General Sikorski.

The diary begins on September 7th, when German columns were already converging on Warsaw from the North, West and South. Four days later Warsaw was surrounded and completely isolated from the armies in the field. But let the diarist tell his own story:

*September 7.* I arrived in Warsaw from Sochaczew during the night. Barricades constructed by the civilian population made it difficult to approach the city. It is obvious that Warsaw will defend itself. At headquarters, in a Workmen's Home, I was awakened early in the morning by some hundreds of children, who came there to get their breakfast. These were children who were lost on roads during the bombardment of the refugees. No one knows whether their parents are dead or living. Before breakfast they recite a prayer for "Poland's victory."

*September 8.* Preparations for the capital's defence are continuing. People are digging ditches to impede the advance of German tanks. Only yesterday artillery began

shelling the city from the West. To-day we were treated to a light bombardment from the air. Three bombs fell in Pilsudski Square, but caused no damage to the houses. However, they made enough noise at Army headquarters nearby.

*September 9.* To-day Praga, the eastern suburb of Warsaw, had its worst experience. The Germans are approaching from East Prussia, and apparently intend to reach Warsaw from the East. For six hours there was one continuous air raid. From our windows at headquarters we could see fires in Targowek, Stare Brudno and Saska Kepa, suburbs of Warsaw. All bridges across the Vistula are under enemy fire. Evidently the enemy wants to cut off Praga from Warsaw, but the bridges are still standing.

Yesterday the pianist Margaret Lipkowska visited headquarters, when she appealed for hospital equipment, beds and blankets, and during the day, in spite of the continuous shelling, she succeeded in establishing a hospital within the walls of the University. There are two additional hospitals in process of formation. What a brave woman!

I reported to General Czuma and was assigned to the defence of Praga.

Lord Mayor Starzynski broadcast an appeal for volunteers to help in digging trenches and erecting barricades. Within half an hour 150,000 men and women were at work. Warsaw is preparing to defend herself. The population remains calm and resolute.

To-night General Thomme took over the command of Warsaw's defence forces.

*September 10.* Have taken over the duties of chief of the Praga Defence. The nerves of the people are still frayed from yesterday's shelling. All about us buildings lie in ruins. The fire at the Transfiguration Hospital, with its

several hundred wounded, was a ghastly business. I saw a soldier with both legs amputated crawling from the building on his elbows; other wounded jumped out of windows on to the pavement. Five doctors and several Red Cross nurses perished in the fire. In Warsaw itself an emergency hospital is in flames. It seems that the Germans are deliberately making it impossible for us to render aid to the wounded. This only strengthens our determination. No one who has seen those burning hospitals will ever be able to forget the sight or forgive the Germans.

The Staff of Colonel Janowski barely escaped being buried under the debris of the shelled school, and was forced to move to another street.

*September 11.* I inspected our front lines. The spirit is good, but the positions still require a great deal of work. Holes are being knocked in buildings for machine-gun emplacements. Two German bombing planes shot down by our troops fell in flames. The soldiers cheered: "They certainly got it that time!"

I spoke to the Commander of the Warsaw Defence. He told me that the German attacks from the North have been flung back. In the West, after successful counter-attacks, our troops have driven back the enemy for more than a dozen miles, and are now preparing to defend the city. Four German tanks penetrated into one of the Warsaw suburbs, Skaryszew. Three of them were captured. The fourth penetrated into the suburb of Czyste, where this also was captured. In the suburb of Wola a German tank which had lost its way was attacked by the civilian population and disarmed.

Lord Mayor Starzynski broadcast a stirring speech to-night, without concealing the seriousness of our position.

*September 12.* The daily life of the capital has returned



## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

to normal; trams and buses are running regularly. Shops, restaurants, cafés, cinemas and theatres are again open. But the bulk of the people are busy making the most urgent repairs of the damage done by German bombers during the past eleven days. Volunteer battalions are being formed, open to all men between the ages of seventeen and fifty-five.

*September 13.* A shell-burst has cut off the water supply from a large part of Warsaw. Emergency squads are repairing the water system under fire. We are unable to prepare hot food. An attack of tanks on one front was repulsed by our artillery fire. Our gunners aimed well.

The first volunteer detachments to reinforce the Defence Army have been sworn in and have taken up reserve positions behind the line. Lord Mayor Starzynski broadcast an appeal to the people to economize food, as supplies may be delayed owing to the proximity of the battle-front.

*September 14.* More troops arrived, including the divisions which fought at Mława and Ciechanów. Andrzej, who is quartermaster of the Engineer Battalion, told us of the bravery of our soldiers, who fought on until they were decimated by enemy aircraft.

To-day a large portion of the Jewish population moved from Warsaw to Praga. It is their Holy Day—the Day of Atonement. Just as the synagogues were filled, Nalewki, the Jewish quarter of Warsaw, was attacked from the air. The result of this bombing was bloody. In this Jewish section there were from 10 to 14 persons living in one small dwelling-house. Trust the Germans to choose the Day of Atonement for their bombing of Nalewki! What thoroughness in destruction!

*September 15.* Water is back in the pipes, but there is a great shortage of food. About seven hundred horses are

being slaughtered daily. This morning I saw a thoroughbred mare, slightly wounded, led to the slaughter. I tried to have her sent to the veterinary hospital, but I learnt that the hospital is no longer there. Twenty years of Polish horsebreeding must have gone to waste in this war.

The bombing to-day was concentrated on the centre of the city. A funeral procession on its way to the local cemetery, where victims of previous raids were being interred, was deliberately bombed and machine-gunned. The people knelt down and repeated the Litany.

*September 16.* Yesterday the Germans introduced a new system of attack. Every minute two shells struck the city, each directed at a different quarter. We are constantly faced with the possibility of having one dwelling after another destroyed. It matters little to the soldiers, but after twenty-four hours of this the nerves of the civilians are beginning to get frayed. I saw my wife and children for a little while. For the last twenty-four hours they had been packed into an air-raid shelter with a lot of weeping old women. My son stood four hours in a bread queue. He is too young to be a soldier, but he has been fired at like any veteran. Fortunately, he was spared and waited to the end. Many others were killed while he was waiting, and he was able to get more bread.

Many historic buildings, including the Royal Castle, have been wrecked. In the suburb of Wola the enemy made a surprise attack in considerable force, but was repulsed with heavy losses in men and equipment. Our troops captured a number of tanks, field-pieces, and machine-guns.

*September 17.* To-day I was ordered to report to Colonel Kotowski, to discuss the question of additional fortifications. I went to his headquarters on the river bank. After an hour's search I found him with the company advancing

in the direction of the Vistula shoals. The electrical power plant is shattered. The printing-presses stopped to-day, and no newspapers are being issued. There is a shortage of candles in the hospitals.

R. came to see me. He told me that a shell hit St. John's Cathedral during mass. Many people were killed, but there was no panic, and Father Kepinski continued the service.

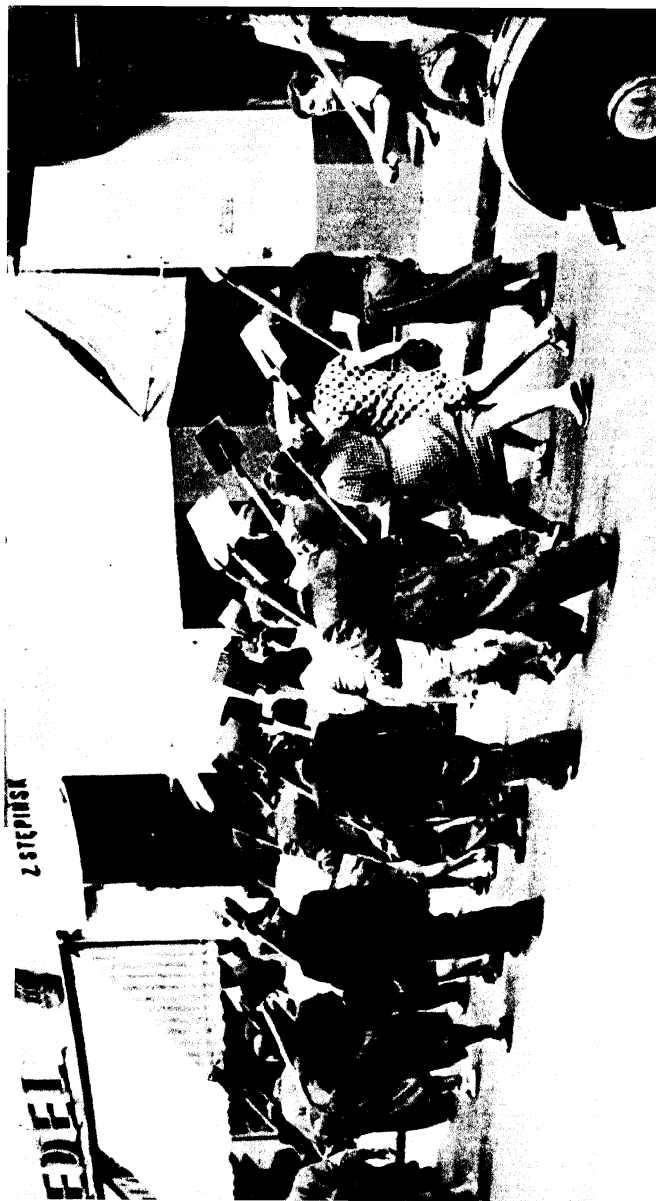
Early this afternoon the Germans dropped thousands of leaflets. One was brought to me. It contained an ultimatum demanding the surrender of Warsaw within twelve hours; otherwise the city is to be completely destroyed. Of course, the ultimatum will be rejected.

*September 18.* Incendiary shells set fire to the Royal Castle. The fire was extinguished, but the north wing caved in.

To-day the German radio announces that Soviet troops entered Poland on September 17th. Is that just a phantasy of their imagination? If it is true, then we cannot count on the relief which we expected from the East. War on two fronts will be difficult. But we shall fight to the end.

*September 19.* Nineteen days of bombing and ten days of artillery bombardment have played havoc with the city. Since Sunday the parks have been opened for burials, and thousands of bodies are being interred.

Arrangements are made for the evacuation of the remaining diplomats and citizens of friendly neutral nations. They will pass through our sector at Praga. The Germans are making no difficulties. Shells have destroyed one of the buildings of the Staff. Our shack swayed, but is still standing. The bread situation is getting worse. The Germans have bombed our two bakeries, and the flour was burnt. There is a shortage of ammunition. We have received orders to economize as far as possible. When the



VOLUNTEERS ON THE WAY TO DIG TRENCHES, WARSAW 1939



TRENCH DIGGING, WARSAW, SEPTEMBER 1939

siege began we had twelve days' supply of ammunition for each gun. More than half of this has already been used. Anti-aircraft guns must operate only at short range. This is too bad, for during each of the previous air-raids we managed to bring down several bombers. To-day we received news of the death of two Knights of Malta of our acquaintance—Lempicki and Chlapowski. They were on their way to a hospital organized by the Order, when a shell struck their motor-car in Aleja Jerozolimska. A glorious death on an errand of mercy!

This morning a German bomber dropped a bomb which hit a house, not far from my headquarters, which I had converted into a temporary prison for about ninety Germans captured during last night's fighting. Twenty-seven of them were killed and thirty-seven wounded.

*September 20.* During the night we managed to bring in several wagonloads of barbed wire from the Praga Station. Our engineers are getting more and more equipment from the German lines. The work on the entanglements is progressing. Very soon our entire front line will be protected. The German radio declares that our Government and our Army Chief have fled to Rumania. We refuse to believe it.

Late in the evening I learnt that our Ambassador in London broadcast a message to Lord Mayor Starzynski explaining that in view of the Soviet invasion the President of the Republic and the Government have crossed into Rumania.

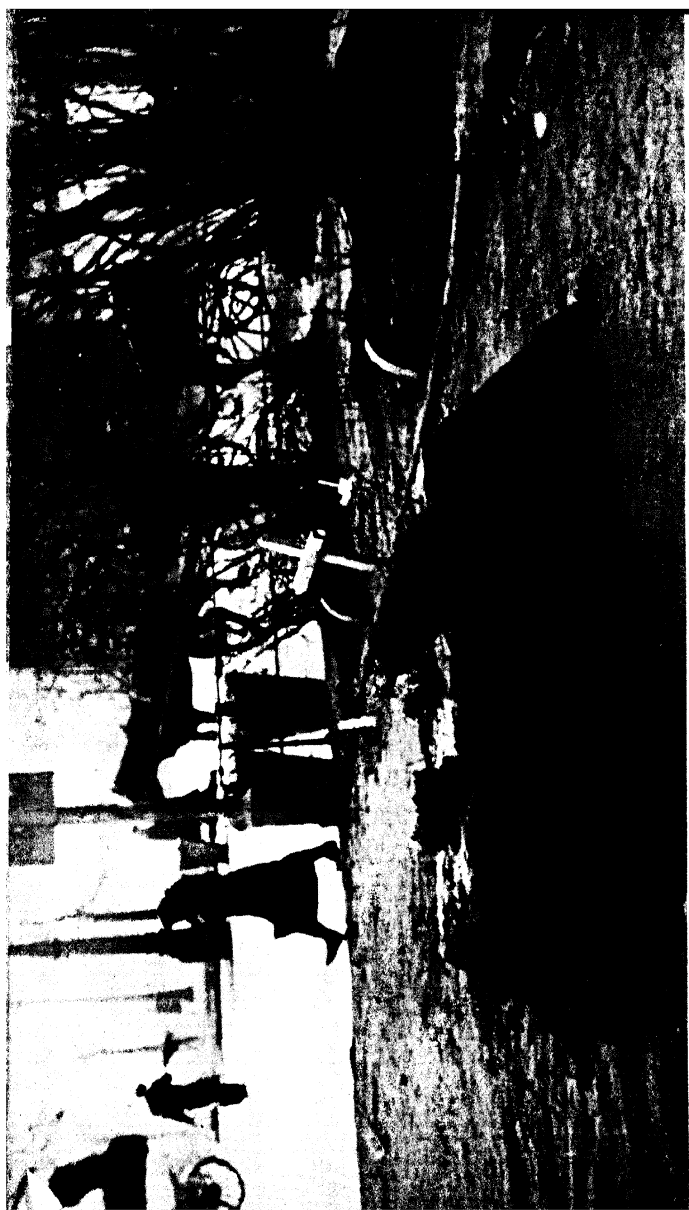
*September 21.* The diplomats have crossed the front line. It is said that only one American journalist remains with us. Immediately following their departure, German planes again dropped leaflets demanding surrender under threat of destroying the city. Of course, they will receive no reply from our General Rommel.

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*September 22.* At eight o'clock, while at the morning assembly of the Staff Group, there was a raid by one hundred and twenty bombing planes. For two hours we waited with the Chief of Engineers in the air-raid shelters. Later we drove to the waterworks and found ourselves in the very centre of the bombed area. For three hours the German planes bombed the filters and pumps. When these were destroyed and the water-supply for the whole city was cut off, they began dropping hundreds of incendiary bombs on the city. The Royal Palace was destroyed, also the church of the Bernardines, a large building opposite the church, and several buildings in the business section of the city. About five hundred fires are raging now simultaneously in a city which is entirely devoid of water-supply. Firemen on the roofs are throwing sand on the flames, but they are machine-gunned by the German raiders.

We had difficulty in returning to Praga. Ruined buildings, shell-holes and fires made progress difficult. After Warsaw our Praga, which now lies in ruins, seems like a peaceful haven. The Warsaw air-raid lasted until dusk. At 6.30 p.m. enemy artillery began where the planes left off. Our Headquarters has been struck by several shells. The roof has been torn off, and we must seek shelter in the cellar. There is a fierce glare over the city. Our beloved Warsaw is burning like a torch. A hard day!

*September 23.* Artillery fire lasted continuously for twenty hours. Houses were falling all around us. We passed between mounds of débris. The city is wrapped in a pall of smoke: it is almost impossible to find one's way. Many bodies lie unburied among the débris. Other sections are now being bombed, and still others will follow. What a waste of ammunition! The Art Gallery is in flames.



"GARDENS INTO GRAVEYARDS," WARSAW 1939





WARSAW, SEPTEMBER 25-27, 1939

## IN BELEAGUERED WARSAW

The tower of the Church of the Saviour lies in ruins; only the steel skeleton of this ancient church remains. Our St. Florian's Church in Praga was riddled full of holes some time ago. The French Embassy is burning. My son tried to save some books from the library, but the police would not allow him to do so. We have to avoid any appearance of looting. The attack of German infantry supported by artillery fire was repulsed as usual. Our soldiers hold their ground very well. They cannot easily be beaten.

*September 24.* To-day there is more quiet in the air. I visited the commander in the Utrata Sector. The valiant captain is trying to repulse attacks coming from three sides at once. At first his company thought that our own artillery was firing at too close a range. When informed that they were surrounded on three sides, they decided to continue the defence. They are suffering heavy losses, but at least they are firing back at the Germans. If we retreated, the bombs would fall on our heads in any case, and we should be unable to retaliate. The observation-post of our artillery is perched on a ledge under the roof of a five-storey house, which has not yet been destroyed. The view into the German positions is good. The Germans are suffering heavy losses.

The lack of water is becoming more and more acute. Sewers have been destroyed, and the few remaining wells are surrounded by crowds of people. On the Warsaw front there is terrific fighting in the west. The City Hall is in ruins; the Deputy Mayor of the city, Mr. Okolo-Kulak, perished in his office, but Lord Mayor Starzynski continues to work in the demolished building. His energy and his will to endure have had a marvellous effect on the people's morale. So long as there was water Warsaw was busy cleaning up at night. Débris was removed, with

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dead bodies and the carcasses of horses, and all traces of blood were washed from the sidewalks. In the morning the capital used to look clean and orderly. But this is no longer possible. Night raids and the lack of water make it impossible for the Lord Mayor to insist on this cleaning-up process.

Towards evening the Germans dropped threatening leaflets calling upon the city to surrender. We are waiting to see what to-morrow will bring, but threats have no influence on our resistance.

*September 25.* The merciless bombardment continues. So far German threats have not materialized. The people of Warsaw are proud that they did not allow themselves to be frightened. I saw a characteristic scene in the street to-day. A horse was struck by a shell and collapsed. When I returned an hour later only the skeleton was left. The meat had been carved off by the people living near by.

It is very difficult to get bread. The days are cold, and for some time now we have had no glass in our windows. Many of our people are ill.

*September 26.* Another terrible day! The thunder of heavy guns did not abate for a minute. But all attacks were again repulsed. The second line of wire entanglements in front of our trenches is being completed. The Poniatowski Bridge across the Vistula is under fire from machine-guns. It is more comfortable to use the Kierbedz Bridge. We have less and less ammunition.

*September 27.* To-day was the worst day of the whole siege, the most alarming! From early this morning a grim silence hung over the city. People moved about silently, trying to obtain food and water. After the ceaseless air-raids and the practically uninterrupted artillery bombardment this silence, this sudden calm seemed a hundredfold

more menacing than the noise of explosions. About eleven o'clock the people began to feel uneasy. They stopped one another in the streets and speculated as to what the meaning of the lull could be. A dreaded thought came to them: could it be the end! I drove to the other bank of the Vistula in order to receive authentic information. There I learned the frightful truth: to-day the city had agreed to capitulate!

*September 28.* I know the reasons for the capitulation. There is enough ammunition left for one day only, and it is impossible to get more. A delegation of civilians called on General Rommel and told him that it was impossible to live in the city under existing conditions. The misery which the people have had to endure! Now they must give in. Honourable conditions have been obtained; officers retain their swords and are to be interned in camps: the soldiers will lay down their arms and be returned to their homes. I swear that I will never be taken prisoner by the Germans!

*September 29.* The Germans continue to postpone their entry into the capital. They are afraid to march their soldiers into a city which has no light and no water and is filled with the sick and the wounded and the dead. They will think it over for a few days. Meanwhile there have been military matters to be despatched. We gave honourable discharges to our soldiers. In spite of the cease fire the front-line companies still wanted to attack the enemy lines. Some of the people in the street had tears in their eyes; they were disappointed in their hope of saving their beloved city. Some seem to resent the fact that the authorities have forbidden them to go on dying for their country. The heartrending cry of the streets finds its way into the homes, where the hearts of all good Poles are breaking.

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When the siege ended we had brought down a total of 127 enemy planes in three weeks. The number of our wounded soldiers left in Warsaw is 36,000; the dead have not yet been counted.

*September 30.* Our last attempt to attack the German lines failed. Nowhere was it possible to break through. To-morrow we shall renew our attempts, because we must fight on!

That's what we thought—that's what our hearts dictated.

IN A WARSAW HOSPITAL—  
SEPTEMBER 1939

*as told by* MADAME  
JADWIGA SOSNKOWSKA  
*to* F. B. CZARNOMSKI





IN A WARSAW HOSPITAL, SEPTEMBER 1939





A CORNER OF THE HOSPITAL GROUNDS, SEPTEMBER 1939

## IV

### IN A WARSAW HOSPITAL—SEPTEMBER 1939

ON August 25, 1939, I reported to the Ujazdow Hospital in Warsaw as a Polish Red Cross Reserve Nurse.

Nearly twenty years had passed since the time when as a young volunteer, during the Polish-Bolshevik war, I worked in the Red Cross Hospital in Smolna Street. All the memories of that distant time came back to me as I entered the gates of the Ujazdow Hospital on this hot summer morning. After twenty years we were again on the threshold of war.

The first few days of my work in the hospital were quiet and peaceful. I found a number of colleagues from the last war, some of whom I had not seen during the intervening years, and there were many things to talk about.

Friday, September 1st, ushered itself in with a golden dawn, and almost before the sun rose I heard the explosions of the first bombs falling on Warsaw. From that day until the end they never ceased to fall. During the first week of September the battles were still raging near the frontiers, and we just waited. Suddenly, on September 6th, transports of wounded began to arrive outside the hospital gates. They were carried in horse-drawn peasant carts, and their wounds, unattended for several days, were a terrible sight. My first patient was a young boy from Lancut, whose leg was torn off by a bomb above the knee; the gaping wound was tied up with a dirty piece of cord. His tortured, bloodless face showed only his young, feverishly burning eyes, and as I stooped

over him he whispered: "Sister, shall I ever be able to march again?"

Soon the ward was full of maimed young humanity. Shattered arms, broken skulls, torn chests and bowels . . . and the contrast between the unbearable suffering and superhuman fortitude of the young soldiers was unbelievable. Except for the movements of the nurses, working day and night, the ward was almost quiet. Here and there a groan left the parched lips of a stricken warrior. The nights were gruesome; the windows were blacked out, and in the operating-theatre the tables and floors were covered with moaning humanity. One moonlit night—I think it must have been the night of September 8th–9th—when we were especially busy with operations, a heavy bomb exploded with a deafening crash just outside the windows of the theatre. All the windows were blown in, and the flying glass was flung at our patients, tearing fresh wounds in their tortured bodies. All lights went out, but the nurses remained at their posts; none lost her nerve, and when the windows were hastily curtained the work went on by candle-light. When I looked down the ward I could not suppress a feeling of admiration for the heroic nurses who carried on without faltering with their heartrending job.

When the bomb exploded I was kneeling beside the stretcher on which a young, fair-haired lad of not more than eighteen had been brought in just a few minutes earlier. He had lost so much blood that he was already dying. I closed his blue eyes and then took off his blood-soaked greatcoat, which I carried into the corridor as if my hands held a sacred relic.

The position of the hospital became most precarious when on September 7th all the military doctors left, in order to accompany the field army, which was taking up new positions on the other side of the Vistula. We had

over two thousand wounded, and the nurses, both professional and volunteers, had often to perform duties which properly belonged to the doctors. When on that day the Government, with administrative and military authorities, evacuated the threatened capital, in order to move eastwards into Lublin, the Matron—a lady who combined all the virtues of a woman with the courage of the soldier—was told that she herself and all the nurses who so desired could also leave the capital. The Matron refused, saying simply that her place was with the wounded; and following her example, all the nurses remained. We were left with one civilian doctor and a few medical students who had volunteered to stay with us. In such circumstances—I think I may be allowed to say it—the nurses demonstrated all the rare and precious qualities of Polish womanhood by their energy in improvising an organization at a time when everything was lacking—surgical instruments, medicines, and bandages—and when even the stores of food were giving out.

Very often the nurses had to purchase the necessary instruments, medicines and food with their own money. No trouble was too great for them, and no amount of bombing ever prevented them from hurrying through the desolate streets to fetch all the things that were needed, or to transport the wounded on stretchers, or to beg food for them. This, however, was rarely necessary, as the people of Warsaw, rich and poor alike, were admirable in their eagerness to help. Long processions of men, and even more women, came to the hospital gates bringing basketfuls of food and wine for the wounded, although the donors themselves could ill afford such gifts. Working-class women, old and young, peasant women, fashionable ladies and artists, were vying with one another to help the hospital and supply comforts for the wounded. Disregarding the devastating air-raids, large numbers of

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volunteers applied to the Matron, offering themselves as nurses. They were ready to undertake the hardest and most dangerous work. Girl Guides, members of the Women's Auxiliary Service, the young Catholic Youth University students, and even secondary school pupils implored that they might be allowed to work for the wounded.

During the next fortnight every day and every night was unforgettable for the scenes of sheer horror and heroism: for the suffering and the fortitude of the wounded and the nurses. The German raids were becoming every day more frequent and more violently destructive. When the enemy planes roared close to the roofs of the hospital buildings our hearts stood still as we trembled for our patients. Each of them was like a son to us, like a brother, like the dearest of friends. During one night, when the artillery barrage of the enemy became so violent that we found it difficult to communicate with one another even from close at hand, we went into the wards, visiting each patient in turn, spending a few minutes at the bedside of the more seriously wounded, and trying to talk to them of pleasant everyday things, pretending that we did not notice what was happening outside.

Even now, after a year, I can remember every one of my cases. I remember how during the first week I tended a seriously wounded musician, a former member of the Polish Broadcasting Company, who had volunteered on the first day of the war. Shrapnel had torn off his right leg, and owing to delay in transport and lack of proper attention his wound was already septic when he arrived at the hospital. His fiancée traced him to the hospital and helped me to nurse him. She too was a promising singer; a young, golden-haired, charming girl.

During those dreadful nights of the heaviest bombardment I used to spend a few minutes with them from time

to time, and we talked of music and of new songs which the doomed soldier-artist discussed with perfect serenity. He knew that his last hour was fast approaching, but he was going into the unknown with his spirit in harmony with eternity and with a tired smile for the anxious gaze of his beloved. I can see them still, so young and beautiful, in the dimmed light of the lamp, with their hands clasped. Early next day a young officer with a mortal wound in the abdomen was brought in and placed a few beds away, in a state of utter exhaustion. His mother and his fiancée arrived before long, imploring us to save their *Staś*. We did our utmost—with operation, injections, blood transfusion—but all in vain. When the morning came he was dying. This was the last night for the young musician also. I shall never forget the moment at dawn when I went from one bed to the other, closing the eyes of the two dead, leaving at each bedside a young woman prostrate with grief, but sobbing quietly for fear of disturbing the other patients.

In the same ward I had a pilot officer suffering from terrible burns. One of his eyes was blinded; his face, hands, chest and legs were black and blistered. With his bleeding lips he whispered his story: how together with his observer he attacked five Messerschmitts, how they shot down two before their plane was set on fire, and how they baled out at the very last moment. He asked me to deliver to his mother his *Virtuti Militari* Cross with a partly burnt ribbon, which we found in the pocket of his tunic. He died just at the moment when for the first time one of the wards was hit by a bomb, and the first fire blazed up in our hospital.

On another night a whole group of officers and men were brought in, all from the same Lancer regiment of which my husband was Colonel-in-Chief. One of the officers knew me, and in spite of his wounds he was visibly pleased

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when he learned that I should nurse him. He was sure that all would be well with him, "since the Chief's wife was going to nurse him." I promised him that I would keep for luck the splinters which were extracted from his wounds. Contrary to all expectations, he recovered after a few weeks. By then he already knew that the Polish Army was being re-formed in France, and that my husband was already there. I helped him to escape from Poland, and when months later I reached the French capital myself, I learned that he had crossed all the numerous frontiers, rejoined the Army, and was already fighting with the First Division in the Maginot Line. He and other officers and men told us the whole story of their hopeless charges against armoured columns, of their struggles until they were surrounded and decimated, until only a remnant broke through, fighting to the last in the true tradition of the Polish cavalry.

There was a young volunteer among the wounded, a talented poet and musician, who in addition to his wound was suffering from tuberculosis. Everyone in the hospital liked him for his unruffled patience and his serene smile. We were all anxious about him, and when an opportunity occurred of sending a number of the wounded into what we then thought were quieter areas we agreed that Adaś must be one of the party. He did not wish to leave us; he argued and begged that he should be allowed to remain; but at last he agreed to go, when he was told that he would recover more rapidly if he were moved, and that he would return to his regiment all the sooner. When the time of departure came he beckoned to me and whispered feverishly: "Sister, you do believe I shall go back to my regiment?" After his departure with the other wounded we tried to learn how he was progressing, but were unable to obtain any news of him.

Among the troopers who were brought to our hospital,

all of whom I remember so well, was one Martin G., a peasant boy, who had dreamt all his life of being a soldier, and who had fought bravely until he fell, seriously wounded. The wound was close to the heart, and when he reached the hospital it was already black and septic. But he kept on insisting that he must be on his feet by November 11th—the Polish Independence Day—so that as a sergeant he might lead a platoon of his comrades during the march past. He was suffering terribly; he could hardly breathe, while the uninterrupted detonations of exploding bombs and artillery fire gave him no respite. Still, he never complained, but only asked us that his wound should be frequently dressed, because he must recover in time. One evening he told me in a whisper of his life in his native village. The night before he had dreamt of the harvest, and he assured me that nowhere in Poland was the wheat more beautiful and golden than in the fields of his own home. He rested for a while, and then whispered again, with the utmost earnestness: "Sister, I shall be a very good sergeant"—and with that he drew his last breath.

The nurses seemed to grow in strength, courage and devotion while the sea of human suffering deepened around them as the horrors and disasters multiplied. My best comrade, and the dearest friend I ever had, was my "little chief," as I used to call Sister Joan. We had worked together during the war of 1920. She was a model of energy and practical good sense, always good-tempered, patient and understanding. When a shower of incendiaries came down on our ward she extinguished many of the bombs with her own hands; when the walls of our wing were literally collapsing she rushed into the ward and covered the patients with anything she could lay her hands on, and when we were carrying them out she kept on exhorting them: "Don't worry, boys; everything will come right!"



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Then there was Sister Jadwiga, with the heart of a dove, and a miraculous gift of handling painlessly the most grievous wounds without inflicting pain. One night she helped me with one of the patients whom the doctor had given up. Both his legs were broken, and to make matters worse his wounds were septic and he was suffering from gangrene. We did our best to save him. Every half an hour I poured through his feverish lips a spoonful of white wine which some good soul had sent to the hospital. I gave injection after injection, while Sister Jadwiga dressed his wounds. For three days our patient hovered between heaven and earth. And then, despite the verdict of the doctor, he passed the crisis and started on the road of recovery. It was a day of triumph for Sister Jadwiga and myself. She was never tired of helping the nurses, sharing with them the last slice of bread, and often deputizing for one of them, in order to give her a chance to rest.

Our ward was under the charge of Sister Catherine, a brave fighter, a veteran of the World War and the war of 1920. Under the most difficult conditions of the siege Sister Catherine always managed to organize and supervise the necessary work of the ward, inspiring respect and confidence by her exertions. We had with us the pupils of the Red Cross School, and all these young girls worked with the greatest devotion. They were our joy, our pride and our consolation. They themselves organized additional wards in one of the hospital wings, and during the heaviest air-raids they not only remained with their patients, but they most conscientiously kept up to the high standard of nursing which they had learned in the school, making beds and changing the dressing of the patients' wounds with the greatest thoroughness. One day a direct hit on the wing killed nine patients and two of our "little daughters," as we called them. The surviving

girls showed no fear, and carrying the wounded into the neighbouring ward they continued their work without rest. One of the junior nurses, Jadzia M., assisted me during the worst days of the siege. She was barely eighteen, with a face like a peach surrounded by lovely dark hair. She had a delightful and unfailing smile. She never lost her cheerful and dignified calm, and even during the terrifying Monday of September 25th, when she helped me to carry the wounded out of the blazing hospital, she was the same fearless, consoling Samaritan as ever.

A troop of Girl Guides and juniors from the Women's Auxiliary Service acted as messengers and carriers for the hospital. During the whole of the siege they ran into the most distant parts of the city, collecting medical stores and food, and picking up the wounded in the streets under the unceasing hail of bullets and shells. Among these volunteers was the exquisite Anne L., whom I knew before the war. Only nineteen, with the grace and charm of a porcelain statuette, she has already made her name as a ballerina. I have seen her several times on the stage, both in Poland and abroad, but never was there more genuine beauty in her every movement than here in this doomed temple of suffering and death.

She volunteered for work in our hospital on the first Sunday after the outbreak of war, and even in her plain simple uniform she was radiantly beautiful, and her steps, the movements of her arms and hands, the bearing of her lovely head, were like a living song. During several nights she did duty with me when the wards were crowded, when the wounded were blocking the corridors, when every minute some patient groaned in his agony, or begged for a drop of water, or an injection, or to have his leg or arm moved to ease the pain. Anne was the ideal helper and brave comrade.

Two days before the fall of Warsaw an old man living

in the same house with her came panting to the hospital with the sad news that their house had been hit by a bomb, that Anne, her younger sister, and a little brother were gravely wounded, and that immediate help was needed. With great difficulty I was able to arrange for their transport to the hospital. I hardly dared to look at Anne, that exquisite flower of beauty. Her back was one bleeding wound, her lovely face was disfigured with cuts inflicted by broken glass, and distorted by the acute pain which she was suffering. Anne was ill for a long time, because her wounds were full of glass and other splinters. Her sister was blinded in both eyes, while her little brother lost one eye and became completely deaf.

The conduct of all the women—nurses, charwomen, cooks, and helpers—was beyond praise. Each did her duty from first to last with utmost devotion, and without a word of complaint. All social differences, all prejudices and animosities disappeared. We were one large family, and the word Sister, by which the nurses in Poland are usually addressed, had its profound meaning. I think the women of Warsaw, in the hospital and throughout the city, lived up to the highest tradition of those millions of nameless women who throughout the hundred years of struggle for independence manifested such devotion, courage, and sacrifice.

Our work became more difficult with every day of the siege. Two of the pavilions had already been hit, and were completely burnt out. It was then that Dr. G. arrived in our hospital. He brought with him a quantity of medicines and surgical instruments, at a time when our own supplies were already running out. He was an old man, who had retired from practice before the war, but now he returned with the enthusiasm and the warm heart of a boy. From the day of his arrival at the hospital he never rested.

In addition to Dr. G. we received much help from a number of ladies who had relatives in the hospital, either as patients or as members of the staff. I well remember Mrs. Mary M., whose little boy of thirteen was operated on just before the outbreak of war. During the worst period of the bombardment he had a relapse, and his mother was powerless to succour her only son, or even to assure the necessary quiet for him. Nevertheless, she was able to tear herself away from the bedside of her only child in order to help us to nurse the wounded. During one of the heaviest bombardments she drove a lorry to one of the suburbs, in order to fetch some urgently needed medical supplies. I admired the fortitude of this woman, whose husband was serving with the Army, whose only son was dying, and whose two daughters had volunteered for defence work in the streets. She never betrayed her anxiety and despair, and was ready at all hours of the day and night to tend the wounded.

I must not forget to speak of the heroic behaviour of our drivers, who volunteered for service with their motor-cars. One of them in particular, Mr. Felix, was already ready to drive into the most dangerous quarters of the city. He manoeuvred in a masterly fashion amidst the shell holes and bomb craters, and he was an inexhaustible source of good cheer and of genuine Warsaw wit.

He had a rival in the person of Mr. Majewski, the husband of our cook, a regular Warsaw type: a good-natured giant, clever and courageous, who was our best ambulance assistant. He carried the most serious cases with the tenderness of a nurse, and wherever he appeared his giant frame and his honest face inspired confidence and hope.

On September 18th, when the raids were continuous, Mr. Majewski brought Lieutenant S. into the ward. He had been wounded on the first day of war by tracer

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bullets in the battle of the frontiers. His right leg was smashed above the knee. He lay all night in the road, and when the German tanks advanced, and the drivers saw him in the glare of their headlights, they tried to run over him, but with his remaining strength he rolled into the ditch. The Germans fired at him from a machine-gun and hit him once more. In the morning a Polish patrol found him and dragged him on a blanket, through fields and woods, to the nearest railway station. There he was put into a freight truck, without anyone to attend to his wounds, and after a few hours he reached the city of Torun. There he was placed on a peasant cart and taken to hospital. He was being carried in on a stretcher when the hospital was hit by a bomb, and together with the rest of the wounded he had to be evacuated again. Packed into a train, the transport started for Warsaw, and was several times attacked from the air. Several wagons were destroyed, but the one in which Lieutenant S. travelled escaped, and what was left of the train arrived in Warsaw during the night. In the morning Lieutenant S. was driven to the Pilsudski Hospital and placed in bed before being taken to the operating-theatre. While he was waiting his turn the hospital was hit by a high-explosive bomb, and a number of incendiary bombs started a fire. Part of the building collapsed, and the nurses had to evacuate all the patients. Two nurses rushed into the ward in which our lieutenant was lying, and without a stretcher they carried his mutilated body through the smoke and fire into the hospital courtyard, where he spent the whole day and the following night among the other wounded, who could not be moved owing to the fires which were raging on every side. On the morning of the second day he was brought to our hospital. I remember the bull-dog look of determination on his young face. He was resolved that he would rather die than live as a cripple. He was

the son of a farmer, and had six brothers, all of whom were serving at the front.

He had to be operated on without delay, and together with Dr. G. I had to waste two hours in searching for all the instruments required. The operation took place during the night. The boy who had already suffered so much was now praying for the success of the operation on which his whole life depended. Hardly had the operation begun when the explosion of a heavy shell shook the whole building. Every now and then a window blew in or shrapnel exploded above the roof, discharging a hail of splinters. I spent the whole night at his bedside, and when he awoke from the anaesthetic, in spite of the fact that he was in acute pain, he was full of optimism, and although for some time he hovered between life and death, he finally recovered.

By this time there were more civilian than military casualties in our hospital; men, women and children from the neighbouring streets. We were almost helpless, since the hospital was not equipped for dealing with such large numbers of wounded, and many of them had to be accommodated on the floors of the wards and corridors. It was unbelievable how the wounded helped one another. None of them complained, and they always insisted that the soldiers should be attended to first. I remember that on September 22nd a wounded soldier, covered with dust and whitewash, with his head wrapped in a rag, brought in a two-year-old girl, Danusia. He had found her under the débris of a building, attracted by her groans. The poor little creature had both her legs shot through, and one of her arms was broken. After her wounds were dressed we put her into a wooden box which we had found in the dispensary, and which we made into a cot. Poor Danusia was so enfeebled, owing to shock and the loss of blood, that she could hardly breathe a word. Only

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from time to time she whimpered for her mother. But no one knew her name or where her home was. Lying on the floor beside Danusia was a ten-year-old boy with a shattered leg, which had to be amputated. When he came round after the operation he asked me to send for his parents, and he gave me their address, but when I sent one of our brave Girl Guides to fetch them she returned with the sad news that both his parents had been killed by the same bomb.

And then came the memorable and terrible day of September 25th. On the previous day the Germans had strewn the city with leaflets threatening utter destruction should it refuse to surrender.

In the early morning I was on my way to one of the wards to give an injection to a patient, when suddenly I heard the roar of low-flying aircraft, and immediately afterwards a heavy bomb exploded close to the building. The walls shook, and through the cloud of dust and mortar I saw the ceiling opening above my head. Bricks and stones were flying about, while the patients were calling for help. We all made haste to carry the patients to the cellars, though it seemed that at any moment we might be buried alive.

Explosion followed explosion. I rushed into the open in order to return to my own ward, which was situated in the extreme wing. It was nine o'clock in the morning, but it was almost as dark as if it had been nine at night, for the air was filled with black smoke from the houses blazing all around us. Every moment a German bomber emerged from the black cloud, diving with an infernal din towards the hospital. Two of the pavilions were on fire, and the Germans continued to bomb the target, while at the same time their heavy artillery was bombarding it, ploughing up immense stretches of earth. Among a group of trees I noticed one of the nurses

escorting several wounded to some sort of a shelter. I hurried towards them to help them, when a German plane dived and released a hail of bullets, flying no higher than the tops of the trees. We made the wounded take cover behind the trees, but the plane made a full circle and seemed to be diving straight into us. I had just time to suggest that we should run close to the blazing building, round which there were dense bushes, for as the wind was blowing in the opposite direction there was just a chance that we should be able to hide our patients there.

For the next few minutes an awe-inspiring sight, terrifying in its horror, held my eyes. The hospital was blazing and belching clouds of smoke, through which the German planes flew in an unending flight. Kneeling behind the bushes, we heard the whistling of the bombs which fell close by, we witnessed the collapse of yet two more of the hospital pavilions, and a second afterwards, as a shell hit the ground a few yards in front of us, a great spurt of black earth and stones flew in our direction and partly covered us. It seemed that the end had come, and together with the wounded soldiers we began to pray: "Into Thy keeping." Then, feeling anxious about my own patients, and leaving the nurse with the soldiers, I set out for my ward, dodging the débris that covered the four hundred yards which I had to cross. When I reached my pavilion the roof was already on fire and all the windows were smashed. The patients had to be removed in haste. The din was deafening, and we could communicate only by signs. While we were carrying the patients on the stretchers we knew instinctively when to stop as each shell came whizzing over our heads, and a second of terrible anxiety followed before it exploded. We had to put the stretcher on the ground and cover the patients with our aprons or whatever was handy, in order to protect them against flying splinters or falling branches and pieces of masonry.



Then we had to make another rush, clinging to the walls so as to hide from the German planes, for they hunted us incessantly while we were carrying the wounded into the building, which was still standing, though for how long it would stand we knew not.

The procession of wounded from the city was an unending march of death. The lights went out, and all of us, doctors and nurses, had to move about with candles in our hands. As both the operating-theatres and the dressing-stations were destroyed the work was done in the lecture-rooms on ordinary deal tables, and owing to the lack of water the instruments could not be sterilized, but had to be cleansed with alcohol.

I shall remember for ever the dreadful night of September 25th-26th, when with one hand I helped to give anaesthetics, holding a candle in the other, while the surgeon was amputating arms or legs. As human wreckage was laid on the table the surgeon vainly endeavoured to save the lives that were slipping through his hands. On the table at which I was assisting tragedy followed tragedy. At one time the victim was a girl of sixteen. She had a glorious mop of golden hair, her face was delicate as a flower, and her lovely sapphire-blue eyes were full of tears. Both her legs, up to the knees, were a mass of bleeding pulp, in which it was impossible to distinguish bone from flesh; both had to be amputated above the knee. Before the surgeon began I bent over this innocent child to kiss her pallid brow, to lay my helpless hand on her golden head. She died quietly in the course of the morning, like a flower plucked by a merciless hand.

That same night, on the same deal table, there died under the knife of the surgeon a young expectant mother, nineteen years of age, whose intestines were torn by the blast of a bomb. She was only a few days before childbirth. We never knew who her husband and her family

were, and she was buried, a woman unknown, in the common grave with the fallen soldiers.

That night I tended also two gentle old people, Mr. and Mrs. N., both of them wounded in the eyes; each had lost one eye, and we did not know if the other eye could be saved. After their wounds were dressed they sat quietly on a bench in the corridor, holding hands and whispering words of encouragement to each other.

The stream of the wounded never ceased. We had to leave the dying in the corridors, as there was no room in any of the wards. Those whom we were able to attend in the improvised operating-theatre we were obliged to place on the floor with a bundle of clothing under their heads. There were so many of them that it became difficult to move about.

Thus the night passed, and the day came, but still the terrible attack was continued without interruption. Warsaw was burning, our hospital was in flames, the windows were smashed, the doors blown in, and there was neither light nor water nor food. The second night of terror passed, and the bombardment of the city never ceased for a moment. We lost all sense of time, and neither minutes nor hours had any significance for this crumbling and collapsing hospital, in which there was no room for the living or the wounded or the dying. Everything became unreal, except the urge to go on tending the human wreckage with which the hospital was choked.

At last, on the third day at 11 a.m., the bombing and the bombardment ceased quite suddenly. Everyone was seized with amazement and terror. I was at that moment in the corridor in which all the dying were placed in rows—long rows of more than a hundred yards of mutilated bodies of soldiers, women and children.

I walked or rather jerked my way among the bodies, to close the eyes of one who had just died, or to hold the head

of another who was about to die. Some time after the bombardment ceased it became lighter, and it was then that I saw the most terrible sight—a river of blood literally flowing down the corridor, washing the bodies of the dead, dying, and still living martyrs. The pale light of day entered through the ragged gaps of the broken windows and illuminated the corridor with its rows of shattered bodies. Here lay a little girl beside an aged, white-haired woman—there a soldier beside an old workman in his dungarees. Old and young, children and adults, men and women, all mercilessly murdered.

I entered the ruined and desolate operating-theatre, which had been wrecked by a direct hit. Climbing over the piles of débris, I saw, still lying on his stretcher, the dead body of a soldier who had been brought in straight from the battlefield. His eyes were open, and there was an expression of infinite peace and calm on his face. Near by was the crumpled body of the medical student who had volunteered for work in our hospital and who had been about to operate on the wounded soldier.

Together with most of the other nurses I went with a bucket to fetch drinking-water, for all the survivors in the hospital were suffering terribly from thirst. We had to go a long way for water, which we obtained from the fountain in the Lazienki Park. Wherever we looked groups of people were emerging from the cellars and the débris of the wrecked houses. Their faces were emaciated, and there was anguish in their eyes as they asked: "Why aren't they firing?" The sun came out, and soon afterwards German planes appeared flying low over our heads, but they dropped no bombs, and only circled slowly over the ruined city.

\* The people of Warsaw would not believe at first that all was over, and neither would the people in our hospital. When after a few hours it was necessary to tell them that

the city had capitulated their despair knew no bounds. The officers and men roused themselves from their beds with a last effort, shouting that they wanted to fight and would rather die than surrender. A number of them who were on the road to recovery wanted to barricade the hospital and defend it, and we had great trouble in calming them and in persuading them that they could do no more.

The young peasant boy whom I mentioned before, who had twenty-four wounds, and whom Sister Jadwiga and I had nursed with special care, woke up and opened his eyes on hearing all this commotion, and when he learned what had happened he suddenly sat up in bed, exclaiming incoherently that he must rejoin the Army. All day long the ward was in a turmoil, and in their despondency the wounded made feverish plans of organizing a defence of the hospital, or of breaking through and continuing the struggle.

On the last day of September I lived through one more painful experience, witnessing the death of a colleague of my eldest son, an eighteen-year-old cadet of the Lwow Military College. Janusz S. was wounded during the last day of the siege, fighting as a volunteer in the defence of Warsaw. He lost a leg, and after the operation it was obvious that his hours were numbered. He was in terrible pain, but he suffered with a quiet fortitude which was worthy of his tragic mother, who came to the hospital and sat at the bedside of her only son. She was able to turn a smiling face on her soldier boy, and when he had drawn his last breath she still sat there, holding the cold and stiffening hand.

Conditions in the hospital were desperate, and the patients were facing starvation, as all our stores were destroyed, and it was impossible to buy any food in the shops. The position was saved by the people of the nearby

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Czerniakowska quarter, who, though short of food themselves, shared with us the little they had.

The last three days of September were hard and hopeless. The bombing had ceased, but the struggle against a thousand and one difficulties began. Wreckage was in our way everywhere. Through the shattered windows a cold wind entered, chilling the unhappy patients. There were so many corpses lying still unburied, there was no food, and there were no medical supplies. These were sorrowful days, but they will live for ever in my memory as days of the greatest solidarity and brotherly compassion of the whole community. I saw more than just so many good deeds. An ocean of kindness welled from human hearts, eager to save, to help, to console. The walls of the city had fallen, but the people of Warsaw remained erect, with unbowed heads . . .

# ON TO THE BROKEN MAGINOT LINE

*as written by*

LIEUTENANT T. P. B.



## V

### ON TO THE BROKEN MAGINOT LINE

WE moved away at last. I stretched out my legs in the sidecar of our "Indian," which was placed with other cars and motor-cycles on an open railway truck.

We passed the neat houses and squares of Massy Palisseux. This was almost Paris. An underground station was a vivid reminder of the presence of the great city. In a few minutes I could see my Paris friends, and perhaps through them send greetings to my mother. But as things were I could not do this. We were going to the front line. No one knew where; this was a military secret, far beyond the reach of the ranks.

I looked round, hoping to ascertain the direction of our journey. It was a warm day, but a curious kind of yellowish mist seemed to conceal everything. I wondered whether this was an ordinary meteorological phenomenon, or some sinister manifestation of chemical agencies.

I overheard a scrap of conversation in which the peculiar fog was described as an artificial anti-air-raid screen. "Aren't they clever to have thought it out?" said one of the men admiringly.

The men in my platoon were still strangers to me. We had been brought together only a few days earlier, and as yet we had had no opportunity of becoming acquainted. During the last week we had to do work which should have taken months. We were snowed up under bales of new uniforms, new weapons, and motorized equipment, so that we had hardly time to eat, and even less for sleep. We had to learn to drive our brand-new vehicles, which



were not yet run in, and to make the acquaintance of the new French sub-machine-guns, which we had never seen before. Continuous alerts kept us on our toes and left no time for personal contacts.

And yet our platoon of twenty-four men contained many interesting personalities. We all looked like brothers in our new uniforms, steel helmets and broad capes, but there was plenty of character and variety under the uniform cloth.

There were several students of the Engineering Academy, one barrister, one engineer, a schoolboy of seventeen from Poznań, some professional chauffeurs, a butcher, some working-men, a University professor, and a country squire—such were my comrades in the reconnaissance motor-cycle platoon. The N.C.O.s also were rather out of the ordinary run. The sergeant's speech and his swinging gait betrayed his origin. He was J—, the famous ski-ing international of Zakopane, champion of Poland, and in his spare time equally proficient as a mountain poacher. Corporal G— had served for eight years in the Foreign Legion, and had seen much service in colonial wars: now, inspired by his sense of duty as much as by his love of a good scrap, he had joined the Polish Army in France.

Such was the platoon commanded by Lieutenant J—, our leader. He had a young, lean face, and there was something in his eyes that hinted at a quixotic romanticism, or perhaps a personal tragedy, buried in the past. He wore the *Virtuti Militari* Cross, won in the first day of the September campaign in East Prussia. A strict disciplinarian, he was nevertheless loved by all. With this commander and our sergeant from the Foreign Legion, we expected to have our full share of war experience.

I recalled the farewell words of Major Z— to our platoon: "I know you will do well under Lieutenant

J——"; and those of Captain P——: "If you are going with J—— you will either return with silver crosses or stay there under wooden ones." Although it was hard to think that we might never see our friends again, we all volunteered to join the command of the dare-devil lieutenant.

The die was cast. The light machine-guns, mounted on posts fixed on our open trucks, arrogantly defied the challenge of the black-crossed birds of prey. The unsprung wheels beat a rhythmical tattoo, and this harsh melody finally lulled me to sleep. I was awakened by a general bustle and the distant but unmistakable roar of Dorniers. I jumped out of the sidecar and hastily loaded the still unfamiliar machine-gun. The baby of the platoon, the seventeen-year-old Mike, was beside me. I was a little surprised to see on his round boyish face the eager curiosity of a child presented with a new toy. Obviously he did not realize the danger.

The Dornier was already quite near us, and others were approaching. He dived on our transport. The machine-guns of the next truck were the first to fire. The tracer bullets were clearly visible. "Not enough advance!" It was the hoarse voice of Lieutenant K—— of the other platoon. I pressed the trigger. The black crosses were directly overhead. Screaming bombs fell in quick succession, and we all instinctively bowed our heads as four explosions shook the whole train. The swastika on the Dornier's tail was already disappearing in the distance. The train stopped. We all jumped out and examined the slight damage done to our locomotive by the splinters. "Get on board!" cried Major Z——.

About fifteen feet to the right of the railway-track we saw a large crater, and on the left a farm-house was burning fiercely. We went on, expecting a new attack at any moment.

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At a small station we stopped beside a hospital train which was bringing wounded from the front. We talked to them, and soon found out where we were going: to the Marne. They begged for bread, saying that they had had nothing to eat for two days. At first we could hardly believe this, but when we saw how they wolfed a loaf which someone gave them we began to realize the truth.

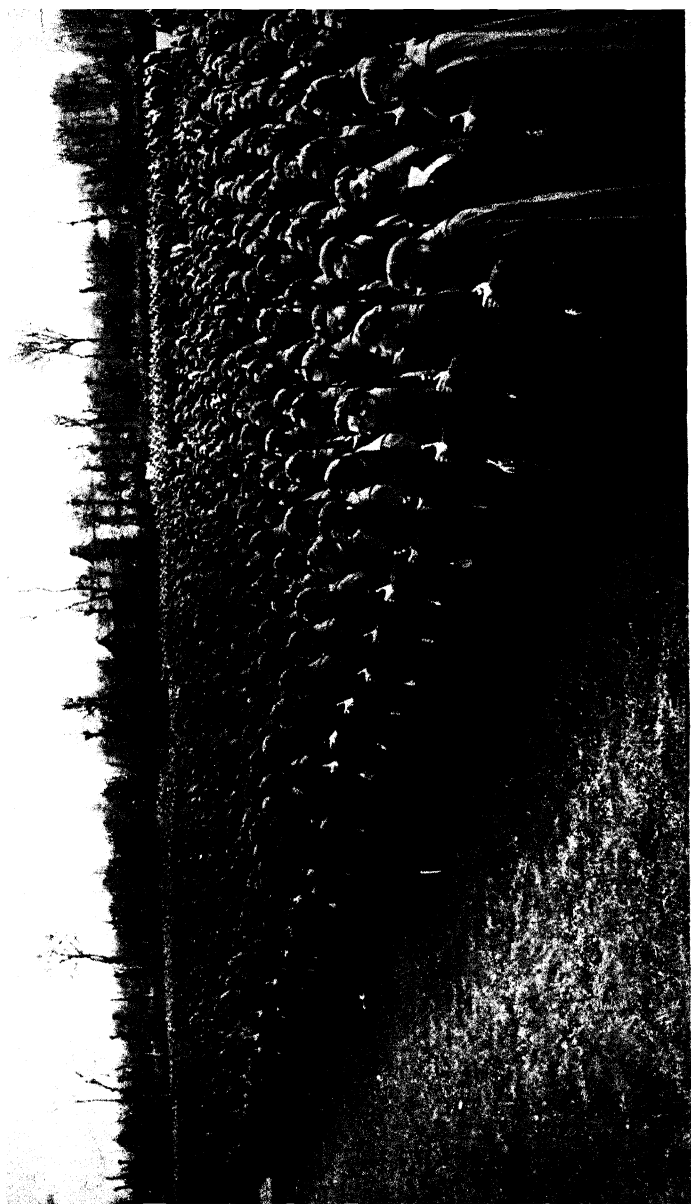
We saw in the eyes of those men the first symptoms of defeat. They seemed to be completely resigned to their fate; there was no fight left in them. They were not like the Polish soldiers who crossed the Rumanian or Hungarian frontier at the order of their commanders, and who cursed and wept with rage, thirsting for nothing but revenge. They were not like the Polish officers, many of whom shot themselves rather than surrender their arms when they were being interned in neutral countries.

We went on. We had another visit from a group of German light bombers, but whether they were discouraged by our heavy fire, or by the falling dusk, they left us after a few low-banked turns.

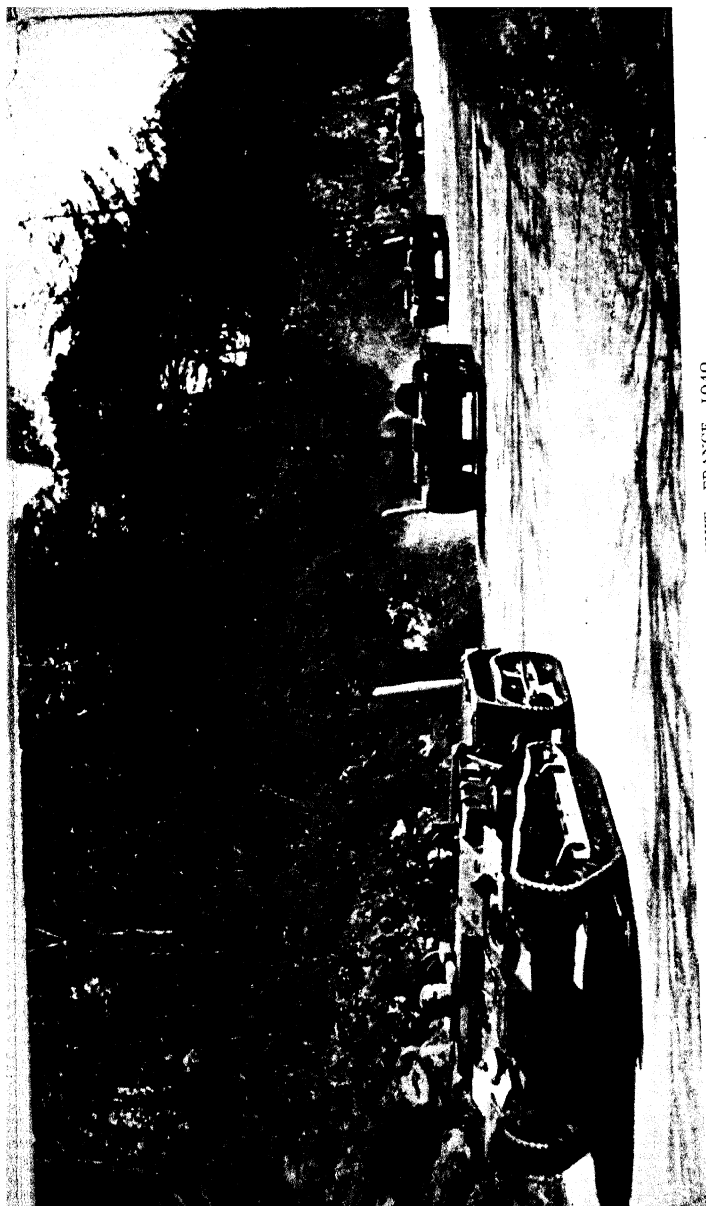
A moment later we stopped at Le Vertus station. It was dark, and a steady drizzle of rain was falling, but that did not prevent us from sleeping. Then came the order to unload. No facilities of any kind had been arranged, and we had to lift our motor-cycles from the trucks. That was easy, but when it came to unloading the lorries we had some trouble with them; but eventually we managed to get them on to the ground.

We were spurred on by the knowledge that the Germans had seen our transport, and were certain to come at dawn, and perhaps find us still at work.

Our platoon was charged with reconnoitring the ground in the direction of Epernay and finding positions for the whole group in the neighbouring forests. We got a move on, and by dawn all the squadrons had taken up



THE POLISH HIGHLAND BRIGADE BEFORE DEPARTURE FOR THE FRONT (IN FRANCE)



A POLISH MOTORIZED ARMoured UNIT, FRANCE 1940

the positions which we had selected. We were just in time, for the station of Le Vertus was completely wiped out by enemy bombers about a quarter of an hour after we had left it.

Bands of French soldiers tramping southwards were seen, marching past our positions in disorder. They were a depressing sight. Dirty, unshaven, without arms, but with knapsacks, they leaned on sticks as they walked; no one commanded them, no one halted them; they were driven only by a desire to get as far away from the front as possible.

We all knew by this time that the German reconnaissance units had crossed the Marne at many points. They were on the road to Paris, the heart of France. After I had seen these men and talked with them I had no further belief in the possibility of defence on the line of the Loire or the Garonne. It was the end; it was perfectly clear that the French soldiers would not fight any more. The faces of our men were white and still. Nobody said anything. The weather was well matched with our feelings, for a penetrating rain soaked us through and through under the thin branches which served as camouflage. Water trickled down my back under my collar. Enemy fighters flew quite low over our positions, but we did not fire, anxious to avoid betraying our presence under the thin cover of boughs.

About 6 p.m. I heard the vigorous tones of our lieutenant: "Start up the engines!" We threw off the screen of branches and took to the road, glad to be doing something at last. In a quarter of an hour we had reached our billets. We had really luxurious quarters, and the big barn provided dry shelter for our motor-cycles. The farmer's wife, who proved to be a Polish woman, opened her house and her pantry for us. We learned that the whole civilian population of the village was under orders

we were about to enter. The body of a French soldier was lying in the doorway, and his brains were scattered on the threshold. I removed his identity disc: Pierre Martin, Avignon.

At the lieutenant's orders we proceeded at once to dig a grave for the Frenchman. As I dug I reflected that before very long someone might be doing me the same service. It took only a few minutes to make a simple cross and to place on it the bloodstained helmet with its bullet-hole. In silence we rendered military honours to an unknown comrade.

We went into the big house, and our heavy steps awoke a sinister echo in its vacant rooms. They were empty of human life, but full of arms and stores, left there in utter disorder. Whole cases of ammunition, bandages, and valuable medical stores were strewn half open on the floor, together with scores of empty champagne bottles.

We quickly changed our underclothes, taking advantage of the large selection of clean outfits left by the French, while our own stores were far behind us in the cars of the supply officer. We used the medical vaseline for greasing our boots, we cleaned our weapons and our engines, and we washed and shaved in the luxurious bathrooms. In about an hour, after some biscuits and champagne, we were ready to take the road again.

The task of our platoon consisted in discovering the strength and direction of the enemy fire and endeavouring to hold out until the arrival of reinforcements. We expected to meet the enemy at any moment, behind any turning, any group of trees.

We refused to admit it to ourselves, but we did not feel very happy. The corpse which had welcomed us to the empty house, and the unlucky date—it was the 13th of June—seemed bad omens. We learned from Cadet G—that some Poles had already met their death near here

only an hour earlier. Another reconnaissance platoon had driven into a village in which, contrary to their expectations, the Germans had already taken up positions. The cross-fire of the enemy machine-guns had quickly destroyed the whole platoon.

We were ready for the worst, but it would have been really a pity to get killed in the first encounter, without firing a shot. Our lieutenant alone seemed to be in the best of spirits. Clean-shaven, smart and tidy, he whistled a gay tune as he inspected the machine-guns and the ammunition. At 10 a.m. he received some orders, and we departed.

In the village of Champaubert we met three Polish tanks which had been sent to support our platoon. Our engineers were just laying their mines beside the road which here ran in a north-easterly direction. The road itself was barricaded with an overturned omnibus, some cars, and sandbags.

Suddenly a car came up at a terrific speed. I recognized Major Z——, the commander of our reconnaissance group. He did not get out of the car. I heard scraps of his conversation with the lieutenant. "You are entrusted with the important task of holding this road to the South, in order to enable the brigade to change positions. You should hold the enemy here for one hour at least." "Very good, sir. We shall hold them longer than that," replied the lieutenant; and they shook hands. The major dashed off again, followed by the engineers in their lorries.

The lieutenant gave us his orders, assigning to each of us his duty. The drivers were told to stand by with running engines on the road leading southwards to Morenil en Brie.

The remaining twelve men—that is, the crews of the four machine-guns of the platoon—passed the barricade and went about half a mile along the road. The lieutenant



showed us the minefields and the possible way of retreat. "We are likely to meet colleagues—the German motor-cyclists," he said. "Be sure to give them a hearty welcome!"

We took up the positions indicated by the lieutenant some fifty yards beyond the crown of the hill. The road stretched straight in front of us for about five hundred yards before reaching a forest. On the right there was a wide expanse of fields and pastures, with another forest in the distance. I took up a position on the right—a rather unpleasant spot on the bare hill, without as much as a tree or a ditch anywhere near.

On the right was the machine-gun of Corporal Z—, and on the left hand was Sergeant J—, with his machine-gun placed against a tree. I could not see the position of the fourth machine-gun. I felt rather tired after carrying the bag with one thousand rounds of ammunition, in full field kit, with helmet, mask, and all.

We tried to dig for ourselves some holes in the ground for cover, but there was very little time for the job. Moreover, the earth was hard and stony, so that our small entrenching tools could hardly bite it. We had not had time even to dig a hole sufficient to protect the head and shoulders when the lieutenant, who was observing the ground with his binoculars, said in a perfectly ordinary voice, just as though we had been on manœuvres: "Well, boys, the work is beginning. There are motor-cyclists away on the right." It was true: there was a narrow country lane, some eight hundred yards to the right of the main road, winding along a shallow depression: along this lane a patrol of motor-cycles was riding. I immediately changed the direction of my machine-gun, which had been sighted upon the main road. I asked the lieutenant for the distance. I also looked at my watch. It was

10.45 a.m. "Four hundred metres. Wait until they come nearer," said the lieutenant.

I felt like an undergraduate at an examination after the first question had been asked—calm at the last moment. This would be the first time I had fired in earnest. The enemy patrol drew nearer; I could clearly see the first three motor-cycles.

"Short bursts. Fire!" said the lieutenant. I aimed and pressed the trigger. There was a dry, hammering burst. I stopped, then pressed the butt to my shoulder and fired a long burst. At that very moment I remembered that I was to fire a short burst. I looked uneasily at the lieutenant, expecting a reproach, and put in another case of cartridges. "Good! Well done!" said the lieutenant, who was looking through his binoculars. "Two motor-cycles smashed. Fire!"

Sergeant J— also opened fire. The enemy bullets were coming from the bushes beside the lane. The lane itself was now empty, but for the two motor-cycles and their riders lying on the ground. I noticed a difference of tone between our machine-guns and those of the Germans, which seemed to have a deeper and heavier bark.

The lieutenant, smiling, with his cane swinging gaily as ever, and without even ducking his head, went over to Sergeant J—. I could still hear his voice, mingling with the deep bass of the highlander. Then "Tiny"—he was well over six feet—who had been told by the lieutenant to watch the main road, cried: "Look out! Tanks!"

I looked, and a shiver ran down my back. One tank after another came out of the forest, and spread in fighting formation over the whole width of the field. One . . . two . . . three . . . seven . . . ten . . . there were thirteen of them. I turned my light machine-gun in their direction.

I realized that unless we could stop them we were lost.

They would get us long before we could run back to the barricade on the road, about a thousand yards away. P—— said nothing, but loaded his machine-gun with anti-tank ammunition. The tanks, apparently surprised by such opposition, stopped and opened fire. We now heard a third tone—that of the quick-firing guns of the tanks, much deeper than either the buzz of our light machine-guns or the drumming of the heavier German type.

From time to time I fired a burst towards the right, in order to prevent the motor-cyclists, now forgotten, from encircling us. I noted with respect and envy the skill of Sergeant J——, the old campaigner, who had changed the position of his machine-gun without retreating. He was firing over our heads.

At last I heard the welcome sound of our approaching tanks. There were three, and one of them passed within a few yards of me. Corporal G—— was riding on the tank, protected only by a small piece of armour-plate, with a sub-machine-gun in his hands. This was more than daring; it was sheer madness.

Our tanks drew most of the enemy fire, so that we had a brief moment of respite. We began to dig furiously with our small entrenching tools, and even with our hands. Looking up, I saw that Sergeant ——, with his tank, had taken on five German ones at a range of about a hundred yards. The German tanks withdrew to the edge of the forest and continued to fire from there. One of them, smoking heavily, was abandoned on the field. It was our first victim. I saw Corporal G—— fall limply from the tank. He would see no more the proud flag of the Legionaries of Marrakesh, or the prouder standard of the White Eagle for which he had fought and died.

Death came among us. K—— was killed. L—— was hit by a ricocheting bullet, and I saw the lieutenant, with

a pair of pliers, pulling the bullet out of his cheekbone. Our tanks were returning. To follow the superior enemy force into the forest would have been suicide.

The German tanks attacked again. Three enemy armoured cars appeared on the main road. We fired burst after burst in their direction. In the heat of the battle we no longer had time to pick our ammunition carefully, and a stream of tracer bullets clearly betrayed our position. It did not make much difference, however, for the Germans knew very well where we were. But we did hit two of the armoured cars.

Our tanks went out again. Corporal S—— was leading the attack, fighting at point-blank range. The Germans withdrew into the forest, leaving all three armoured cars out of action. "Good work!" said my loader, P——.

Our tanks eventually had to retreat, one of them slightly damaged. Then hell broke loose around us. We had German tanks and infantry in front of us and on the left, while the motor-cyclists attacked us from the right. A hail of bullets broke chunks of asphalt out of the road and threw earth into our eyes.

Loading, firing and digging became one unending sequence, and we lost all notion of time. One thought remained in my blurred mind—to hold out. The instinct of self-preservation told me to go, to leave that self-dug grave as quickly as possible. I tried to argue with my frightened self; telling it that I had come here all the way from Poland, to fight as a volunteer, that I had given up the O.T.C. in Serignan in order to go to the front, that death would be better in any case than the dismal life in barracks which had made me—a free man until now—so miserable during those last few months. The logic of my arguments seemed to have convinced my other self, for I became quite calm again, and lit a cigarette. I glanced at P——'s face. He was obviously going through

the same internal struggle. "We are lost here," he said quietly, loading the machine-gun from his now almost empty ammunition-bag. Then his lips murmured the words of the finest prayer in the world: "Our Father which art in Heaven . . ." I realized that this man would not leave his post.

On the left I no longer saw Sergeant J——, and Z——'s machine-gun on the right had long been silent. I looked at my watch. It was five o'clock. I could hardly believe that we had survived six hours of this hell.

Then I felt a blow on the head, and simultaneously I heard J—— shouting from the ditch: "Lieutenant's orders, withdraw behind the hill!" I was terribly tired, and felt rather groggy. I slipped into the ditch. Although "Tiny" told me to crawl, I walked almost erect, for I simply had not the strength to stoop. Another thirty yards, and we were out of the field of the enemy fire.

The lieutenant, smiling, asked me what I had done to my tin hat. Surprised, I put my hand up to my head. The helmet was gone, but the leather lining, strongly held by the chin strap, had remained in position. "He did not even feel it being blown off," said P——.

"Take up positions in the building on the left," said the lieutenant. I saw him take the light machine-gun from Corporal Z——, and then, together with S—— (the former barrister), they went in the direction of the enemy tanks. I saw them approach to within a hundred yards of the enemy, and I wanted to shout a warning: "You are going to your death! Stop!" But they disappeared in the tall grass, and there was only the rattle of their machine-gun to indicate that they were still alive and fighting.

We took up our new position. This was easy work, for we were faced by only one tank and a small detachment of German infantry, who tried to advance under the

cover of a herd of cows which they drove ahead of them. Well covered by the wall, we could shoot them down like rabbits. I had only a rifle, for my machine-gun had been taken by the lieutenant. I felt almost defenceless with that slow weapon, but I fired whenever I saw a German approaching.

The sun was setting, and I could no longer hear the fire of our men, while that of the enemy continued undiminished.

P—— went to see our motor-cycles. He returned quite pale. They had all gone—tanks and motor-cycles alike. The village was quite empty. Then I heard the characteristic bark of a German machine-gun on the road to Morenil en Brie. We were surrounded. We dashed out on to the main road, placed our remaining machine-gun on the barricade, and made ready for a last stand there.

I quickly destroyed all my documents, with some photographs and letters that I had treasured. We heard the roar of an approaching motor-cycle. I aimed carefully at the middle of the road and held my finger on the trigger. I had almost fired, but at the last moment I recognized one of our own machines. The driver stopped it with screeching brakes. It was our Mike. His baby face was smiling cheerfully under the helmet, which was much too big for the boy. In a few incoherent words we told each other our stories. Cadet H—— had been unable to stand the strain, and, believing that the lieutenant and the rest of the platoon had been killed, he withdrew three kilometres along the road. Mike, acting against orders, drove up under enemy fire to save us. A good comrade!

Mike stepped on the accelerator, and the speedometer needle went up to 100 kilometres, and then 120, with the powerful engine roaring flat out. Enemy bullets raised dust on the road just behind us. Just another mad turn, and we should be safe!

## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

It was 8 p.m. The platoon greeted us like men returning from beyond. They kept on asking us whether we were wounded. The lieutenant, who had turned up by a different route, told us that we had done well, and that Mike and myself would be recommended for decoration. I thanked him without much conviction. I did not believe that any of us would survive the next few days. We were practically surrounded, and we had already had 20 per cent casualties on that first day; besides, I thought that the others too deserved recognition. But I was glad to think that my long journey and the months of waiting had not been altogether wasted, and that I had been able to give the Germans some of their own stuff.

It was nine o'clock. I was not hungry, although I had had nothing to eat since the morning. I drank a glass of wine with parched lips. My heart, softened by fifteen years of university and office life, was letting me down a little, although it had managed to pass the rather casual medical examination on joining up.

All I wanted was a little rest. . . . Thirty German bombers came overhead, secure in the knowledge that no Allied plane had appeared in the sky for several days past. They dropped bomb after bomb into the forest in which we were sheltering. The explosions were followed by the crash of falling trees. We did not fire; we were anxious not to betray our position.

A little later, after leaving our motor-cycles under guard in the forest, we advanced in single file, our rifles ready to fire. Where? Back to Champaubert. An obstinate fellow, our lieutenant.

There was not a soul in the village. The Germans, fearing an ambush, had withdrawn for the time being. We had a hurried dinner of tinned meat and wine.

By 12.45 our engines were running, and we were off on a new mission.

# **A FIGHT FOR A FRENCH CITY**

(The war diary of a  
Squadron Commander)

*as written by*

**K. B. C.**





## VI

### A FIGHT FOR A FRENCH CITY

THE Brigadier bade us march in the direction of Montbard as the advance-guard of the 42nd French Infantry Division and prepare for the crossing of the Burgundy Canal by the whole division.

The Brigadier was faced with a difficult problem. Theoretically it would have been possible to find a way out towards the East, and if we had made use of that outlet and had tried to overtake the encircling movement of the German armoured units, the brigade could still have been saved from the general chaos. The situation was made more difficult by the fact that the commander of the French 42nd Division had appealed to the Franco-Polish brotherhood of arms, to the Polish chivalry and courage, and had expressed the hope that the brigade would help him. He relied on us as the only unit whose morale was still unbroken, and which, unaffected by the general panic, was ready to fight.

The Brigadier's decision was simple: "We are Poles. Either the brigade will carry out its task or it will be annihilated. We shall fight to the end."

We were short of petrol. It was therefore decided that we should destroy in the forest all our unarmoured vehicles. Even some of the tanks had to be destroyed. The petrol from the abandoned vehicles was transferred to those which were to carry us to Montbard.

The French liaison officer at Brigade Headquarters, Colonel Duchon, who was present when this order was issued, could hardly conceal his amazement, and asked

why we were abandoning valuable material. When he was told the reason he immediately offered to supply us with . . . petrol coupons.

In the meantime Lieutenant M—— returned from reconnaissance. He reported that the towns as far as Laignes were unoccupied, but that there were traffic jams on the roads, while in Tonnerre there were considerable German forces. He did not reach Montbard, but it was believed that the Germans had arrived there in the morning. There was a passage near Dijon, but our orders were "to effect a crossing at Montbard."

At 3 p.m. some shots were fired in the forest, and presently the enemy opened a regular machine-gun fire. Our outposts were fighting the German patrols, who began to close in on our position from all directions, so that the transfer of petrol, ammunition, and effects from the abandoned vehicles had to be carried out under fire.

At 4 p.m. we set out. At the first turning of the road we encountered some German tanks. Two of our tanks met them, and there was a hot interchange of shots. Then, as the main road was blocked by the enemy, our anti-tank guns took up positions, and under the cover of their fire we turned to the right, where we found, some five hundred yards further, a narrow forest path.

Unfortunately a part of our squadron did not notice the turning, and went straight along the road towards the Germans. All the drivers had a sketch-map of the route, but they probably missed their way under fire. Major Z—— was furious. The platoons of Lieutenant G—— and Second Lieutenant P—— were missing. Captain E—— dashed after them on a motor-cycle, at seventy miles per hour, followed by Lieutenant K——; but after a few minutes they both returned, unable to overtake the platoons. There was still some hope that, travelling at full speed, the drivers might have broken through to the

other side of the village; but we could not wait any longer, since the advance-guard of the brigade was already well ahead of us.

In the evening the rear of our column was attacked at Laignes by a German motorized unit. Our men counter-attacked and took thirty prisoners, but they themselves unfortunately suffered some casualties, which delayed them so much that they were cut off from the brigade, with the result that its main body was reduced in strength.

After Laignes there were no more ambushes, but the civilian refugees who were streaming along the road in an opposite direction to ours told us alarming stories about the presence of a large German force in Montbard. They were quite amazed to see that in spite of such reports we continued to proceed in the direction of the enemy.

At 10 p.m. our advance-guard encountered a barricade and enemy fire on the northern outskirts of Montbard. On the road there were many smashed cars and bodies of French soldiers and horses, obviously caught in a German trap. When our squadron reached Montbard one car of the 1st Platoon, with Lieutenant G——, was missing. All the others ran at top speed through the village: it was held by the Germans, but they had time to fire only a few volleys. The mudguards of the first two cars were full of holes. No one knows what happened to G——.

It was quite dark when we heard the order: "Dismount from cars for action!" We went ahead immediately, and when General Maczek, who was with the squadron commander, saw us coming he cried: "Have you got all your machine-guns?" Without stopping I answered, "We have!" and ran on.

There was already a good deal of firing, and the 2nd Squadron, which was without machine-guns, although it

was with the advance-guard, attacked immediately with fixed bayonets. This attack, supported by tanks, succeeded in ejecting the Germans from the suburb. As we had no maps we were ignorant of the precise location of the bridges on the canal, with the result that the 2nd Squadron made an unnecessary attack along the streets turning to the left, while the bridges were on the right.

We stopped at the first crossroads, while the squadron commander received the orders to be passed on to the platoon commanders. In the meanwhile the Germans were using tracer bullets. It was a fine sight! Our machine-guns were still silent; I had not yet received my orders.

"Platoon commanders to the fore!"—the order went down the line. Second-Lieutenants P—— and K—— were already there. I had behind me Cadet S——, who was in charge of our mortars. On the left the ground rose abruptly. On the right there was a garden with some shrubs and buildings. In front of us the street forked, and we could see only a few yards ahead. I heard Major Z—— speaking to his aide-de-camp, but I could not see them. Captain E—— called us to him and said: "We shall attack along this street and down the right fork. The attack of the 2nd Squadron is not making progress. We shall advance with tanks and take the bridges, of which there are said to be two. Now I shall give you detailed orders. Lieutenant P—— and his platoon . . ."

At that moment Lieutenant P—— made a sudden movement, and something fell on the ground. I thought it was a pair of binoculars, or a revolver. But a second later there were a violent explosion and a red flash. I jumped instinctively sideways. It was a grenade.

At the same time the enemy fired several long bursts into us. Someone behind me was moaning, and I heard a shout: "The captain is wounded." I turned. Two

soldiers were supporting the squadron commander under the arms.—“Where is he wounded?”—“Left leg, left arm, and twice on the left side of the chest.” I helped to cut open his uniform, while an ambulance man placed tourniquets on the leg and arm. I gave orders to remove the captain to the rear. At that moment he cried in a weak voice: “Forward, boys!”

I went up to the group commander, who was already issuing orders to the platoons. I called for Cadet S——. Someone replied: “Cadet S—— is wounded.” His deputy joined me, and at the same time Lieutenant K——’s platoon began to move forward on the left, and Lieutenant P——’s on the right, while my own platoon was preparing to attack straight along the street with its machine-guns.

We were all ready for action, and a moment later five machine-guns opened fire, sweeping the street. This was the platoon’s first experience of a night action, and street fighting at that.

We passed the line of the 2nd Squadron. They told us that there were Germans some eighty yards ahead—plenty of them. We began to creep along like cats. I placed a machine-gun on either side of the street. Then, at a given signal, the first gun opened fire straight ahead, and the second sought its target by the light of the tracer-bullets of the first. There was no reply for a moment, and then they gave us a burst down the middle of the street.

This gave me the position of their machine-gun. Private S—— exclaimed with delight: “We’ve got them now!” At the order “Fire!” the two machine-guns fired full volleys. I saw two Germans jump back, one of them probably hit, for he fell in the middle of the street.

We began the attack. One machine-gun fired while the other was run forward a few yards, and so we progressed along the street. As Germans might fall upon us from any

doorway, or any side street, we kept our hand-grenades ready for such emergencies.

After our fourth burst of fire there was no reply. With my revolver in my right hand and a hand-grenade with the safety catch pulled out in the left, I slowly advanced, creeping along the wall. There was silence. . . . I heard distant machine-gun fire in other streets, and some explosions, which might have been due to hand-grenades or to artillery.

I listened. There was no movement and no talking ahead. Then I ordered a long burst from the first machine-gun. In the light of the tracers I saw a German machine-gun and a body lying beside it, probably dead. There was another body in the street. They were some twenty yards ahead. We advanced again. I heard someone moaning about ten yards ahead of us. We went on, until we had almost reached the German machine-gun, which was still silent. Another few steps, a leap, and we were there. The wounded man moaned again.

While we were trying to turn the German machine-gun against the enemy they fired a volley at us at very short range, and we made a dash for the wall, seeking cover. There was a second burst from the other side of the street. I whispered to C—: "Let the right-hand machine-gun move on to the corner as soon as the other one fires." C— went slowly back, and I heard him quietly repeating my order.

Just as I was going to give the left-hand machine-gun the order to fire I heard steps behind me. It was Lieut.-Colonel M—, our tanks commander. He told me that the Germans were retreating on the right wing; the tanks were all in action. But the centre, where we were, was offering stiff resistance, and no one knew what strength the enemy had there. I asked him how our boys were doing, and he said they were fighting very well, but that

there had been some killed and nearly a score seriously wounded.

We broke off our conversation, for I had heard from the German side something that sounded like the roar of a tank or a motor-cycle. It came nearer, and Cadet S—— joined me behind the corner of the house, with rifle and fixed bayonet. I shouted "Grenades!" and ran to the other side of the street, from which I had a better view of the turning.

I heard a motor-cycle approaching in low gear. It was quite near. Our nerves were tense with waiting. It came within sight. There was a shot. Cadet S—— merely stuck out his bayonet, and the German's momentum drove it into his body. The motor-cycle overturned, and the cadet jumped forward. He gave a strong thrust, so that the thin French bayonet pierced the German's chest and bent on the cobbles. I heard S—— cry: "That's for my father!"

Some of the men gathered round the German, but I told them to go to their posts, and I carried the wounded soldier to the side of the road, where we tried, with Colonel M——, to get some information from him, asking him whether the Germans had any artillery, and how many of them there were in the town. He said they had no artillery, but his voice grew weaker, and I saw that he was dying. I gave orders that he should be taken back with the motor-cycle, and we continued the attack. At the moment it occurred to me that it was rather odd that he should have been riding in our direction.

I went forward again with revolver and hand-grenade. There was fire from both sides of the street, very low over the pavement, with bullets hitting the curbstone within a few inches of me.

There was an interval, while our right-hand machine-gun advanced again. The men joined me, and when we opened fire I could see the positions of both the German



machine-guns by the light of our tracer-bullets. They were some thirty yards distant. When we ceased fire in order to change the belt they gave us a few bursts. Private H—— cried out, and I saw that his face was distorted with pain. I asked him what was the matter. "My leg. . . . They've got me!" We took him, together with Private S——, round a corner. I ordered the others to attend to him and take him back, as he had two bullets in the left thigh.

S—— took charge of the machine-gun, and I myself began to feed the belt. I told S—— not to fire in the dark, but to wait for the left-hand machine-gun to begin. In a moment it fired a long burst, and we saw German helmets. S—— fired in their direction. At first it looked as though he had got them, but after a moment the Germans replied.

We gave them another burst, and I decided to make another rush forward. I heard behind me the voice of the wounded private, H——, trying to persuade G——, who was carrying him to the rear, to leave him where he was and go forward with the machine-guns. Brave boy! I told G—— to go back with H—— and bring up a box of ammunition, while I quietly dragged the first machine-gun forward.

We were interrupted by a terrific explosion, as a grenade burst in the middle of the street a few yards ahead of us. I ordered both our machine-guns to fire into the windows on the opposite side of the street. The broken windows rang and tinkled, and in the light of our fire I saw a crouching figure break away from the wall a few yards ahead of me and run back. I fired a few shots with my revolver, and he fell. Damn him! He got up again and began to run. I took better aim next time, and got him.

The German machine-gun on the left fired a long burst while the right-hand gun was silent, but our left-hand

gun jammed at the same time. I could hear the click of the mechanism, but it did not fire. To make up for this, S—— fired one long burst after another. I hastily considered how we could dislodge the Germans.

I suspected that their right-hand machine-gun had been damaged, but the other was still lively. Then I had an idea. The street sloped down very slightly toward the German gun positions. If we threw a few hand-grenades, they would roll along like billiard balls right up to the Germans. Our grenades were of a heavy type.

I told S—— to stop firing, and we arranged that immediately the grenades had exploded all except the crew of the machine-gun would rush forward. If we were lucky, both their machine-guns would be ours. If they should open fire we would creep along the walls, and S—— would fire back at them.

In the meantime C—— returned. He had reported to Major Z——. Captain E—— was by that time bandaged and put into a car.

"That grenade was thrown by a German from the shrubs," said C——. "It fell on Lieutenant P——'s chest and exploded in front of the captain. It's a wonder the lieutenant was not hurt."

He had brought some ammunition, and I explained my plan to him. He gave me one of his grenades, while I gave him my revolver to hold. There was silence as I bowled first one and then another grenade. We all waited tensely. . . . One second, two, three, five, and then—bang! bang!

We leaped up and ran forward. The street was strewn with broken glass. Two or three Germans were running away; they vanished in the darkness as we reached their machine-guns. Beside the left-hand gun we saw the shattered body of one of its crew.

As we advanced again I heard a violent explosion on

the right, apparently within a few hundred yards, and there was a blaze in the same direction. I was told afterwards that our tanks had set fire to a German armoured car.

We came to the end of the street which we were to take. We were just approaching the crossing when I stopped instinctively. At that very moment bullets whizzed past us. Another step, and we should have stopped them.

We halted. There was a gate on the right. Perhaps we could circumvent the enemy? We went through the gate into a courtyard. Here there was something that looked like a cellar entrance. Together with G—— and Stas we entered the place, and G—— listened to what was going on in the cellar. I saw him wave to Stas and take a hand-grenade from him.

We all listened quietly. A voice came from the cellar: "Kamerad, Kamerad, komm hier!" G—— cried softly: "Kamerad?" I could see his face and his tense figure, the grenade in his left hand, the rifle in his right, bent forward, as though he were propping himself with his own bayonet. He stood by the door and waited. There were furtive steps on the stairs; there was a brief movement of G——'s hand, a second's silence, and then . . . bang! The whole house shook and trembled. A heavy body tumbled down the stairs, just below G——, and a steel helmet rolled on the stones. We did not even stop to see whether the German was dead.

We went out again to the crossroads, advancing cautiously. There was no fire on the right, but we heard several grenades explode, then the sound of voices as we approached Lieutenant K——'s platoon. It seemed that the Germans had retreated, for the street was empty, although there was some machine-gun fire farther on.

A messenger arrived from the rear with the order that

I was to report with the machine-guns to the group commander, leaving only a strong patrol on the spot. I looked at my watch—2 a.m. When I reached him, Major Z—— told me the news. The Germans had withdrawn everywhere, and their machine-guns were still firing only on the other side of the town, on the hill.

Lieutenant-Colonel M—— and Captain S—— joined us, and I learned that the fighting had been most severe on the right flank, where Lieutenant K——'s platoon had attacked, together with the tanks. As it was dark the tanks could not advance unless they guided them along the street. This was how Captain Cz—— was wounded. He had just led the first tank into the right direction, when a heavy German anti-aircraft gun, aimed horizontally for night fighting, fired along the street. The shells hit the wall beside him. The captain and three men of his platoon were seriously wounded.

Lieutenant S——, who was also with the tanks, had a serious accident, but fortunately escaped with his life. In attempting to drive his tank on to the bridge he turned too far to the left, and seeing nothing in the darkness, he fell about eight feet into the canal. The whole tank was submerged, but he managed to get out through the trapdoor, and came to join us, although his head was badly knocked about.

Lieutenant K—— also reported. His platoon had seven men killed and ten seriously injured. We went to the dressing-post, where we learned that a grenade had struck Zielinski on the head and smashed his helmet, killing him on the spot. Then a burst of machine-gun fire had got Corporal O—— and G—— and J——, who were all killed. When they stormed the position of the heavy anti-aircraft gun they had taken it, but at the cost of three men. Corporal P—— was wounded, while S—— and Sz—— were killed.

I visited the wounded. W——, who afterwards died of his wounds, was in the car. They all asked for something to drink. It was 2.45 a.m. and dawn was breaking, but it was very cold, and the wounded were shivering. The field ambulance men brought them some blankets and gave them wine, but the medical situation was tragic. We had no doctors; the last of them had disappeared some days earlier. The ambulance staff were simply soldiers who had attended a first-aid course, but they knew very little, and carried only a first-aid bag. We were short of bandages and had to send for supplies to the cars, nearly two miles away.

The sound of fighting gradually died down. There were hand-grenade explosions and a few shots from time to time, but nothing else. Private L—— reported that there were Germans in one of the houses about three hundred yards away, and that they had thrown several hand-grenades from the windows, so I sent out a patrol of volunteers.

We heard two shots and the explosions of two grenades, and half an hour later the patrol returned, Private S—— escorting a prisoner. Private S—— de C—— was leaning on the shoulders of L——, who was the proud possessor of war booty in the form of a good camera and a Mauser pistol. He reported that there were three Germans in the house; two were killed, while the third surrendered. Unfortunately, just as S—— de C—— was approaching a window in order to throw in a hand-grenade, a German leaned out and threw one himself, wounding him in both legs. Luckily the injuries were not serious.

I went up to the prisoner. When he saw me approaching him with a revolver in my hand he began to cry, and begged me not to shoot him. I told him that he could drop his arms, and that if he would tell the truth I should not shoot him.

"Which is your regiment?"

"66th Motorized Infantry."

"Which division?"

"Thirteenth Armoured Division."

"How many of you were here?"

"Two battalions, less one company."

"Was there any artillery?"

"No."

"Where did you come from?"

"From Tonnerre."

"Where were you going?"

"To Dijon."

"Did you know against whom you were fighting?"

Apparently they did not know at first, and wondered who could be attacking them so viciously. He had not been through such hell since the beginning of the war. Their battalion had heavy losses. For the last three days they had had no fighting, but had been driving towards Dijon unopposed.

"Were you the first to come here?"

"Yes."

"Are any other troops following you?"

"Yes, the rest of the regiment, and the divisional units."

I also asked him some personal questions. Aged twenty-two, he had been to Poland, and had taken part in the battle of Kutno, but had spent only two days in Warsaw. His father was dead, but his mother lived in Germany. His daily pay was two marks—that is, forty francs. It was a bitter reflection that a soldier of wealthy France, with her great colonies, received 75 centimes a day, while a soldier of "poor" Germany got 40 francs. Later on I saw the German soldiers buying up the goods in the shops of occupied Lyons.

I wrote down the prisoner's deposition and sent it to the Brigade Commander. The wounded were taken to

the cars, and I held a roll-call. There were nine killed and fifteen seriously wounded. We had taken three light anti-aircraft guns, one heavy anti-aircraft gun, two armoured cars (one of them burnt out), five light machine-guns, and two automatic pistols. The patrols reported about sixty German corpses. Unfortunately about twenty civilians also had been killed in the course of the fighting; they had exposed themselves at the doors or windows.

Major Z—— drove up. According to the information obtained from other German prisoners, the German columns had advanced far to the South. They were travelling from West to East, towards the Swiss frontier. The French 42nd Division had changed its direction, and was no longer making for Montbard, but for a point farther to the East. Consequently we too had to leave Montbard and proceed eastwards. We were furious, but orders are orders.

The night battle for Montbard, which ended in a victory won under very difficult conditions, had been wasted. We learned that in taking Montbard we had rescued some thirty French officers, who had been imprisoned by the Germans in a barn. Montbard, the scene of our success, in which our young soldiers had proved their courage and determination in attack, throwing two German battalions into such a state of panic that the soldiers left their machine-guns and ran away, remained, after our departure, a sort of no-man's-land.

I approached the cars. Three of them were filled with the wounded. The stretchers on which they had been carried were soaked with blood, as we were still short of bandages. Our column slowly reached the forest clearing where the Brigade Headquarters was established.

I was sorry that we had been unable to bury the dead, but when we halted in the forest I mustered the whole squadron. The sergeant-major read the roll again, and

I gave the order to stand to attention. We all turned towards Montbard, and I saluted. There was an absolute silence. I felt the tears rising to my eyes. Someone was weeping audibly, and tears were rolling down the cheek of the sergeant-major.—“Stand at ease!”—That was all that we could do for our dead. I took the roll of the squadron and turned its pages. On every page there were two or three crosses marked with a thick red pencil.

It was five o'clock in the morning, and the fog had not yet cleared. In the misty dawn we left Montbard behind us.





**FROM BERLIN TO THE  
MAGINOT LINE**

*as told by*

**JOSEPH LIPSKI to  
F. B. CZARNOMSKI**





POLISH INFANTRY\_ IN THE JURA MOUNTAINS, FRANCE 1940



## VII

### FROM BERLIN TO THE MAGINOT LINE

LIEUTENANT JOSEPH LIPSKI, of the Reconnaissance Battalion of the 1st Armoured Motorized Division of the Polish Army, has had a distinguished diplomatic career, which began in London in 1919, when he was appointed second Secretary of the then Polish Legation. After successive stages in the Embassy in Paris, the Warsaw Foreign Office, the Legation in Berlin, and again in the Polish Foreign Office, he was appointed Polish Ambassador in Berlin in 1933, and remained at his post until the outbreak of the present war.

His diplomatic mission having failed, he returned to Poland by a circuitous route, only to find that his Government had left the capital. When, owing to the Soviet Russian invasion, the Polish armies were trapped, Ambassador Lipski decided to go to France in order to join the Polish Army which was being re-formed on French soil. He enrolled as a private at the Polish Military Camp in Brittany on October 16, 1939. In a billet "somewhere in Scotland" he told me his story:

"At noon on September 1, 1939, I asked the German Government for my passport, and on the following day, together with my staff, I left by special train for the Danish frontier. After crossing into Denmark, I travelled through Sweden, Finland, Estonia and Latvia, and arrived in Wilno on September 10th. There I learned that the Polish Armies were withdrawing to new positions behind the Vistula, that Posen and Cracow were in the hands of the enemy, that Warsaw was threatened, and

that the President and the Government of the Republic had left the capital three days earlier, moving towards the South-East.

"I started from Wilno on the following day with the intention of joining the Government. Travelling southwards for nearly a thousand miles, I had ample experience of German methods of warfare. Passing through sleepy little towns, I saw them cruelly and senselessly bombed and machine-gunned from the air. The slow-moving train was bombed many times, and near Rowne nine bombs fell close beside it without, however, causing any damage either to the train or to the permanent way.

"On September 11th I found the Government at Kutu, near the Rumanian frontier. I made my report, and at last I was free to consider my own position.

"Together with a number of my companions I decided to join the army of General Sosnkowski, who was heavily engaged to the south of Lwow in the Carpathian border region. We had already started on our trek over the Carpathian ranges, when on Sunday, September 17th, we learned that Soviet Russia had stabbed Poland in the back—that Red armies had crossed the eastern frontier of Poland from the Latvian border to the Dniester, and were occupying the eastern counties of our country.

"We had no choice left. My comrades and I were compelled to cross the River Czeremosz into Rumanian territory. But this was not the end of our wanderings. Escorted by Rumanian patrols, I proceeded to Czerniowce, the capital of Rumanian Bukovina, and thence to Bucharest. There I learned that a new Polish Army was to be formed in France by General Sikorski. At last all uncertainty vanished. As soon as I had complied with all the troublesome formalities I left Bucharest, and travelling by way of Belgrade and Milan I crossed the French frontier, and on October 16th, together with several of

my colleagues from our Foreign Office, I reported to the officer on duty at the Polish Military Camp at Coëtquidan in Brittany.

"I volunteered as a private, and was soon drilling strenuously under a martinet corporal, who had fought in the Tatra mountains, and after his battalion was wiped out had crossed the mountains into Slovakia and Hungary, whence he managed to make his way into France a few days before my own arrival.

"Answering the call of General Sikorski, thousands upon thousands of volunteers, including former soldiers and officers, rallied in France, flocking to the colours from all corners of the world: from prostrate Poland, from France itself, from Hungary, Italy, Yugoslavia, Lithuania, Latvia, Sweden, Spain, the United States, Canada, the Argentine and Brazil. The wanderings of these men across many frontiers, speeding towards France by land, on the seas, and through the air, were often worthy of celebration in a modern Odyssey.

"Many of my comrades in Coëtquidan had fought all through the Polish campaign; many had escaped after being captured by either the Germans or the Russians. Others had broken out of internment camps in the neutral countries into which they crossed rather than surrender.

"After I had completed my training as a recruit, I was admitted to the Cadet School which had been established in Brittany. There I met volunteers representing all social classes and from all walks of life. We had among us high Government officials, diplomats, lawyers, judges, journalists, artists, university students, and even schoolboys. The ages of the cadets varied from seventeen to forty-eight, but this disparity did not prevent the development of a fine spirit of comradeship, inspired by the unanimous longing to be done with the school as soon as possible and to get to the front.



"I must admit that the change from my former life as a diplomatist was something of a shock. I had to sleep on damp straw in damp, cold barracks, getting up to the sound of the bugle at 5 a.m., eating food from an army kitchen, drilling all day long, and handling heavy machine-guns to the accompaniment of an unceasing flow of scathing comment from the sergeant-major. Physically this unaccustomed life was often painfully exhausting, but spiritually I have never felt happier than in the horizon blue of the private. That uniform, which had been worn by other soldiers before me, endowed me with the great privilege of familiar contact with the simple people who were my comrades. I enjoyed to the full the evenings, spent over a glass of Calvados in a local French estaminet among the *poilus*. There I certainly gained a better and more direct insight into the soul of France than during my official conversations, in former years, with social and political leaders in Paris.

"At the end of March 1940 I passed out of the school as a cadet N.C.O., and was assigned to the 1st Division of Polish Grenadiers, with whom I proceeded to Lorraine. From Lorraine I was drafted into the Maginot Line. Barely eight months had passed since I had shaken off the dust of Berlin. Now I was to face the Germans once more, but this time with a weapon more convincing to German mentality than a diplomatic note. The 1st Division, under the command of General Duch, was attached to the 20th Army Corps of Alsace, and was entrusted with a most difficult task, which it performed with gallantry to the end. After the collapse of the French front my division, covering the retreat of the French armies of Alsace, was in action until June 21st, suffering heavy casualties, amounting to some six thousand killed and wounded. I was in the reconnaissance group in command of a squad of ten men and two machine-guns. I remember

well one of the many episodes that occurred during the final stage of the fighting, when I was attached to the advanced units of our division, and we first met the attacking Germans in the Saar sector on the River Alba.

"My reconnaissance group was ordered to reinforce the French, who were defending this sector of the front. The Germans put up a strong artillery barrage preparatory to an attack on our positions. A French company nearest to the river was driven back from the wood which dominated our own positions, and our company commander was ordered to recapture it, while the Germans were covering the regrouping of their troops prior to another attack with a renewed artillery barrage. From my post I had to support the counter-attack of the Polish company with my two machine-guns. The wood itself was hidden in a thick cloud of smoke in which a German company was concealed. Two Polish platoons advanced through the barrage and opened fire at the Germans from a distance of about a hundred yards, only to break off after a few minutes and rush forward in a bayonet charge with the battle-cry "For Warsaw!" With scarcely any casualties the Poles reoccupied the wood, capturing prisoners and war material and destroying the whole German company. After this counter-attack the Germans redoubled their fire on our sector, and some four squadrons of German bombers appeared, dropping over a hundred bombs on our positions.

"The reconnaissance group of our division took part in further operations, especially in the heavy fighting on the Rhine-Marne Canal, but the French Army of Alsace was already completely encircled in the forests of the Vosges, and on June 22nd it capitulated. I have never seen anything more pathetic than the sight of that army in the Vosges after capitulation. Many French officers who had fought bravely in the last victorious war were now

standing with tears of helpless anger in their eyes. Amidst the columns of the surrendering French troops, already marching toward the war prisoners' camps, the first German patrols were making their appearance.

"The position of the 1st Polish Division was desperate. We all knew, of course, that for us there was no surrender. Our commander by then had heard the instructions issued by the C.-in-C., General Sikorski, by means of the Polish News Bulletin broadcast from London, to the effect that we were to join the English. General Duch gave orders that we were to destroy our arms, split into small groups, and force our way through the German lines in the general direction of the south of France and the Mediterranean coast, where we hoped we should be picked up and transported to Great Britain.

"We fell in for the last roll-call of the division, and the calm dignity of the ceremony was profoundly moving. As soon as the battalions and companies were dismissed we were left to ourselves to make our way as best we could.

"I joined the little group which was led by our company commander, a young lieutenant, a well-known Polish sportsman, who had distinguished himself in the Polish campaign. He had a most extraordinary sense of direction and was a man of great courage and quick decision. It was very largely to him that we owed our escape through the German lines.

"We had all been serving in a motorized cavalry unit, and it was only natural that we were in the habit of walking as little as possible. We hated the prospect of tramping through fields and forests, and decided to make a dash for the South. We carefully selected one of the many motor-cars abandoned in the Vosges, and after collecting as much petrol and oil as we could from other cars we started on our journey through Alsace, at first

keeping close to the German frontier. We calculated—and as it proved correctly—that the German advance would have been greatly confused and disorganized by the tens of thousands of French prisoners of war descending into the valleys of Alsace. For the first two days we hid in the hills, but on the third day we had to come into the open, so we joined a French administrative column and followed it closely in the direction of St. Die Colmar. All this time we were looking for a good road forking off towards the South-West, but we had to stick to the main road, as German sentries were posted along it at very close intervals. We continued to follow the French column through the towns and villages of Alsace, passing German detachments who were busy tearing down French posters and replacing them with German announcements. They even removed the French signs from the restaurants and shops. Wherever we passed we could read despair and dejection in the faces of the local population.

“Suddenly the French column stopped. All French soldiers were ordered to leave the cars, and we then discovered that we had arrived at a prisoners of war camp, and were about to be marched off into it! That wasn’t at all what we were looking for, so we broke away and travelling at full speed we reached the head of the column. The German sentries at the entrance of the prisoners’ camp were apparently misled by our effrontery and allowed us to pass without troubling to challenge us. We had passed the camp and were approaching a cross-roads when two German soldiers jumped off a stationary car, signalling us to stop. Pretending not to understand their frantic gestures, we swerved into the turning on the right and drove on at breakneck speed.

“We still had to negotiate Colmar, which we could not by-pass in any way. As we were approaching the city, travelling at no more than twenty miles an hour, we were

overtaken by a German military car. "We must hang on to it!" our leader at the wheel explained, as he accelerated in order to catch up with the German car. All through Colmar we hung on to its tail, and the German sentries must have thought that we were in attendance on the three German officers, for no one stopped us.

"As soon as we were out of Colmar we turned into the first road branching off towards the South, and having left our German pilots we continued at full speed until our borrowed car stopped. We had not a drop of petrol left. It was lucky for us that we were a good ten miles from Colmar. We pushed the car off the road into a small wood; there we strapped on our little bundles, and we began our long and weary tramp across France. We marched by night, hiding in the woods during the day. We would not risk entering the towns and villages which we passed on our journey, as they were already full of German soldiers. Several times we had to wade through streams and rivers, as the bridges had been blown up. Once, when following a railway line, we walked into a station which was guarded by German sentries, and we had to creep away again, ducking beneath the windows, which were fortunately blacked out.

"While still on Alsatian territory we sometimes came across groups of people in the woods, who welcomed us with the utmost friendliness, offering us food and other comforts, and in general displaying much patriotic feeling.

"After six days and nights of wanderings we met some kind-hearted people who helped us to continue on our journey in greater safety and comfort, by giving us civilian clothing. We carefully wrapped up our uniforms and left them in a disused well, buried under stones, in the safe keeping of a charming lady whom we faithfully promised to visit after delivering France from the Germans.

"Dressed as respectable working men, we were now able

to move freely through the French towns, even when they were occupied by German troops, and we did not hesitate to use any available means of transport.

"Progress was of necessity very slow, and it was only on the seventeenth day from that last roll-call in the hills of the Vosges that we reached the blue waters of the Mediterranean.

"Our adventures had not ended. We had still to make our way to Great Britain—but this part of my story must remain unwritten for the duration of the war.

"It is enough to say that by the middle of September 1940 I was able to set foot on English soil, and after reporting at the Polish Military Headquarters in London I rejoined my unit 'somewhere in Scotland' as a fully fledged Second-Lieutenant."



THE ODYSSEY OF THE *ORZEL*

*as told by* CAPTAIN PIASECKI

*to* BOHDAN PAWŁOWICZ







*[Sport and General*

CAPTAIN PIASECKI OF THE SUBMARINE "ORZEL"



*[Central Press*

THE COMMANDER OF THE "ORZEL," CAPTAIN STANISLAW GRUDZINSKI

## VIII

### THE ODYSSEY OF THE *ORZEL*

IT was in a small hotel somewhere in the Highlands of Scotland that the crew of the O.R.P. *Orzel* were resting after the toils of their exploits in the Baltic and their perilous voyage to Scotland, which represent one of the most brilliant episodes of the war at sea.

The officers were billeted on the ground-floor, and they passed their time either in a quiet and comfortable smoking-room—such as one finds only in Scotland—or they went for long walks in the woods or on the mountains.

One day I found myself walking with Captain P——, one of the heroes of the *Orzel* Odyssey. He liked these Scottish mountains, he told me, for they reminded him of Poland; there, in the Carpathians, were similar expanses of forest, and in the Tatras there were just such wild crags. The captain mused for a while. We came to a halt on the edge of a ravine, close to a little waterfall. It was there that he told me the story of the *Orzel*.

“As a matter of fact,” he said, “we haven’t done much—except that our crew were magnificent.

“On September 1st the O.R.P. *Orzel*, together with the other Polish submarines, was patrolling the waters of the Gulf of Danzig, between Gdynia and the Peninsula of Hel. We remained there for the first four days of the war, to protect the gulf against any attempts on the part of the powerful units of the German Navy to penetrate its waters, but on September 5th it became clear that we could not do much good by remaining there, and in accordance with instructions, the *Orzel* left the Gulf of

Danzig before nightfall with orders to attack German warships and merchantmen in the open Baltic.

"As we were leaving our home waters we were chased by German E-boats on patrol, and repeatedly attacked by German bombers circling overhead, which twice discharged a number of depth charges. In the two hours during which our engines were stopped, and the *Orzel* was submerged many fathoms below the surface, I heard the explosion of ten depth charges. We remained in this position until nightfall, and when we moved on blindly, without the periscope, in order to get away from the shallow coastal waters, we often heard the scratching of wire cables against the steel hull of our craft. Frankly, we hated the sound.

"After a time we managed somehow to get into deeper water and were able to begin our task of patrolling the central Baltic, which we continued for seven days, without, however, sighting a single German warship, and only once approaching a Swedish merchantman. On the sixth day our commander was taken ill, and at the same time, as luck would have it, one of the more important instruments indispensable for navigating the submarine was damaged. We tried to repair the damage on board, but were unsuccessful, so we set our course for the port of Tallin in Estonia, which we entered the following day.

"According to the international conventions regulating the entry into neutral ports of warships flying the flag of a belligerent Power, we were entitled to remain in the port for not longer than twenty-four hours, on condition that we were able to prove the necessity of effecting essential repairs. On our arrival in Tallinn the *Orzel* was immediately put under an armed Estonian guard; but after our commander had been sent ashore his successor, Captain Grudzinski, was assured by the local Estonian authorities that we should be allowed to leave port as

soon as our damaged instruments were repaired. Soon afterwards, however, we were told that we should have to remain in port for at least forty-eight hours, because the German freighter *Thalappa* was about to sail, and the *Orzel* would have to allow her time to get away in safety. This also was in accordance with international convention. Observing the *Thalappa*, I could see how on our arrival she changed the markings on her funnel and hauled down the German flag. Noticing, however, that the *Orzel* had been put under guard by the Estonians, the *Thalappa* hoisted her proper flag again and put to sea during the night of September 14th-15th.

"The spot where the *Orzel* was berthed was surrounded by Estonian warships, and Estonian officers and sailors boarded our submarine, ostensibly to assist in effecting the necessary repairs, but really as a naval guard.

"We officers and men of the *Orzel* did not like the look of things, especially as we had reason to suspect that the Estonians were submitting too readily to the pressure of the German military representatives in Tallin, and that they were about to disarm the *Orzel*. After holding a hasty council of war, we decided to destroy all documents and codes, and to seize the first opportunity of slipping out of Tallin. However, events developed more rapidly than we expected, and on the same day we had to look on helplessly while the Estonians removed all our ammunition, gunlocks, rifles and navigational charts, and finally preparing to disembark our torpedoes.

"While all this was going on, and while only the exemplary discipline of our men prevented them from throwing the Estonians overboard, I was called to the gangway and was told that the British Military and Naval Attaché had arrived to pay us a courtesy visit. The Estonian guards would not allow him to come on board, but he handed me two of his visiting cards, on which he hastily

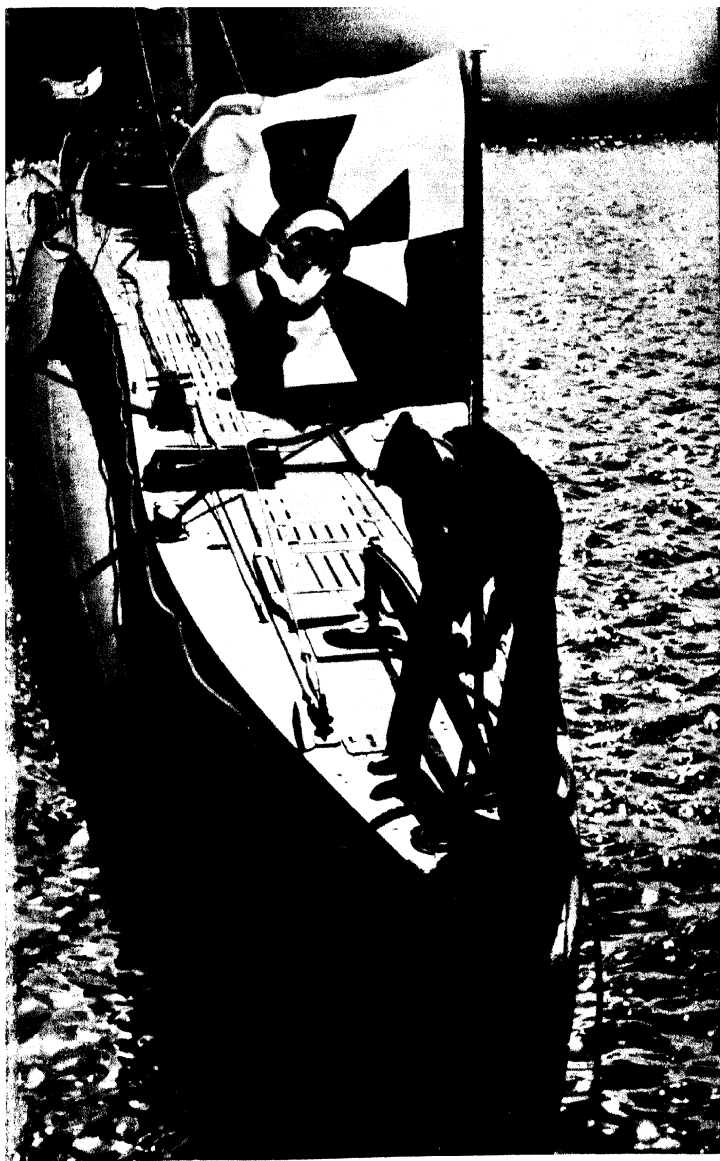
## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

wrote a few words. They were 'Good luck' and 'God bless you.' In our sorry plight this was a welcome message of good cheer, and we were all much comforted by this friendly gesture from an ally, reminding us that in our isolation we still had the whole might of the British Navy to fall back upon.

"On Sunday, September 17th, our decisions were taken. Captain Grudzinski proceeded to prepare for our escape, and issued all the necessary orders. Eluding observation, he himself cut the cable of the torpedo hoist, and coming up on deck reproached the Estonians for having caused the cable to snap. They accepted this unsuspectingly, and as it was Sunday they decided to put the job off until the following day. The *Orzel* was thus left armed with six torpedoes which had not been removed before the hoist was put out of action.

"The hour of escape was set for midnight; but at midnight precisely the Estonian officer in charge of the guard came to inspect the sentries round the dock. Two long and anxious hours of nervous tension followed, during which our men played their part to perfection. At 2 p.m. the order for action was given by Captain Grudzinski. Four of our sailors, who on going ashore an hour earlier had received their instructions, now appeared at the top of the landing-steps, where two sentries were posted. The two Estonians were seized and gagged before they could utter a sound, carried down the steps, and handed down through the conning tower. The *Orzel's* second-in-command cut the electric cable, thus extinguishing the searchlight. Two men severed the wire cables, by which the *Orzel* was moored to the buoy, and finally I cut the telephone wires connecting us with the dock. A moment later the engines were started, and the *Orzel* slipped away.

"On leaving this unfriendly harbour in the darkness of



THE POLISH SUBMARINE, O.R.P. "ORZEL"





*Sport and General*

THE CREW OF THE "ORZEL"

night for waters abounding in treacherous shoals and reefs, without charts, with guns out of action, and no ammunition, except for the six torpedoes in their tubes, we knew that we should have to play a lone hand in the hostile Baltic, where no harbour was open to us.

"On the evening of our escape we had learned with despair that the Russians had invaded our country that very morning, and that our land forces were trapped. We sailed into the unknown with only one desire in our hearts: to break out into the North Sea and join the British Navy, or to sell our lives dearly.

"At first all went well; but when the *Orzel* began to veer round our manœuvre was noticed by the Estonian destroyer lying closest to us. Suddenly I heard the alarm bells, but fortunately the engines of the *Orzel* were already running at full speed. Disaster stared us in the face again just as we were clearing the entrance to the port. The *Orzel* ran on to a reef and grounded by the bows. We rapidly discharged the ballast in the bows and flooded the after tanks, when by reversing the engines we succeeded in freeing the ship. Here the elements intervened, contributing to our salvation. A stiff head wind drove the dense black smoke from our Diesel engines along our wake, just between the *Orzel* and the Estonian destroyer, which opened fire blindly into the smoke-screen, missing the entrance to the port by a few yards. Then followed the rattle of machine-guns and rifles, and a hail of bullets struck our armour, without causing us the slightest harm.

"Having at last got clear of the harbour we were just passing the coastal batteries when we were caught in a searchlight. Six-inch shells exploded around us in dangerous proximity. We submerged immediately, and set our course to the North—or what we guessed was the North. For some time we heard the explosions of depth charges astern. We remained submerged all that day, and

## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

came to the surface only as dusk was falling, somewhere near the entrance to the Gulf of Finland. In the distance the minute shapes of unidentified warships appeared, but we could not recognize them, and were not at all keen to satisfy our curiosity. On the contrary, we set our course in the opposite direction, and we were lucky enough to slip off into the open sea undetected.

"We discussed the problem of what we should do with the two kidnapped and imprisoned Estonian sentries. On the evening of September 19th, listening-in to the B.B.C. News Bulletin in Polish, I heard the announcer referring to a German allegation that the crew of the *Orzel* had murdered two Estonian sentries. I reported this to Captain Grudzinski, and he decided to land the two Estonians as soon as possible on any neutral coast, so that the world might know without delay that they were alive and well, and by no means disgruntled by their unexpected adventure, having indeed expressed their sympathy with our cause.

"During the night of September 21st-22nd we sighted an island, and when about two miles offshore, the sea being calm, we lowered our collapsible boat, placed the two Estonians in it, giving them a sufficiency of food, enough whisky to keep them drunk for a week, enough money to carry them back to Estonia from any spot where they might land, and a courteous letter to the Estonian Admiral, in which we explained our reasons for departing from Tallinn without taking formal leave, and exonerated the two Estonian sentries from all responsibility for their involuntary trip abroad. We waited for nearly an hour to make sure the men reached the island in safety.

"Our real work of patrolling the Baltic now began, and we were itching to expend our six torpedoes usefully. For sixteen days we sailed to and fro, north to south and east to west, encountering dirty weather and rough seas,

but never a single German warship or merchantman. The sea was as desolate as the Antarctic, while our stores of food and fresh water were gradually giving out. Moreover, our stock of fuel was diminishing at an alarming rate. For nearly a week we were without any water for shaving or washing. At last, when even our drinking water was nearly exhausted, Captain Grudzinski decided to leave the Baltic and make for a British port. Of course, we could have entered Swedish waters, at the risk of being interned for the duration of the war, but the officers and men alike were determined to carry on, even though we were a ship without a port and sailors without a country. It was already the second week of October, and we knew that Poland was in the grip of the German and Bolshevik invaders. We knew that Gdynia, our home port, was in German hands, and that the last fortress on the Baltic, the Peninsula of Hel, had been taken by the Germans a week earlier, after nearly five weeks of stubborn defence by a mere handful of our marines.

"When on October 7th we set our course for the North Sea, we knew that we had one chance in a hundred of getting through. We ran as close as we dared to the Swedish coast, and tried to hold on to it as long as possible, although we were in constant danger of either running the *Orzel* on to submerged reefs or going aground in the shoal water. The Baltic is exceptionally shallow on this side; very often the depth of water was no more than sixteen feet. We sighted several Swedish and German gunboats patrolling along the coast and sweeping the water at night with their searchlights. One night, when I was peeping out of the conning tower, I had an exciting five seconds. The beam of a searchlight was moving in our direction, and it seemed that nothing could save us from discovery. Then, when the beam was only a few yards away from our stern, it suddenly stopped. For

almost five seconds it remained stationary, and then slowly began to move away. I felt that the icy hand of death was almost touching our lonely and all but helpless ship.

"The passage from the Baltic into the North Sea is exceedingly difficult and hazardous, even in daylight and with all the necessary charts. We had no charts whatever, and we had to creep out of the Baltic through the narrows of the Oresund by night. All we had was a sketch drawn from memory by our navigation officer, based on his previous knowledge of the Baltic and the straits. With the help of this somewhat primitive chart, on which, by a co-operative effort, we marked the coastal lighthouses and the lightships, the O.R.P. *Orzel* completed her patrol, passed the Sound, the Kattegat and the Skagerrak, and sailed into the North Sea.

We had a narrow escape. While entering the straits all officers and men, excepting the engineers on duty, stood on deck with lifebelts fastened. All the ballast-tanks carefully emptied, the engines were driven at full speed, and the *Orzel* just managed to skim over the shoals at the narrowest point of the Sound. We still had to traverse the channel, which we assumed was mined at both ends by the Danes, and which is, of course, studded with reefs and shoals, which we had to dodge without the aid of charts. But again we were lucky, for it was Sunday, and we knew that the Danes are not fond of exerting themselves on a Sunday. We steered a northerly course, until we had reason to fear that our presence had been discovered by hydrophone. We dived at once, and settled down on the bottom for the next twenty hours, during which we almost uninterruptedly heard the sound of screw propellers passing overhead. At last the *Orzel* cautiously came to the surface, almost colliding with a patrolling motor torpedo-boat. Other patrolling boats

## THE ODYSSEY OF THE "ORZEL"

were near, so we had to dive again. An hour later we again came to the surface, only to dive once more, as we were suddenly caught by a searchlight. We remained under water for the rest of the night, with the intention of having a crack at the enemy at dawn; however, when we came up there was nothing but the empty sea around us.

"By then we were quite worn out, and we found the lack of water particularly distressing. Our nerves were taut with incessant watching, and the few occasions when the men were able to snatch a little sleep left them unrefreshed. To add to our discomfort, when we finally entered the North Sea the waves were running high and the wind was blowing half a gale, chilling us to the bone.

"I shall not attempt to describe my emotion when on Saturday, October 14th, at 11 a.m., after an Odyssey of forty-two days, which seemed to us more like six years than six weeks, we sighted H.M.S. *Valorous*.

" 'What ship is that?'

" 'Polish O.R.P. *Orzel*.'

"Our British allies could hardly believe the truth: indeed, we could hardly believe it ourselves. The first thing we learned was that our sister ship, O.R.P. *Wilk*, had preceded us, and had reached the safety of a British port, and that our destroyers *Blyskawica*, *Grom* and *Burza* arrived in British waters in the first week of the war, and that they were all fighting side by side with the British Navy.

"Our boys, though terribly tired and exhausted by the long wanderings of the *Orzel*, without water and with only stale food, were nevertheless in the best of spirits, and already talking of going to sea again to look for the hated enemy.

"We were given long leave while our *Orzel* went into

dock for overhaul and rearmament, and we were billeted in a pleasant little hotel 'somewhere in Scotland.'

"The voyage of the *Orzel* seems to me quite unreal now in this peaceful and homely countryside; but since we came here I have read so much about the horrors which the Germans and Russians have inflicted upon our country that I feel I have no right to be here, lounging and enjoying myself . . ."

Captain P—— stopped as suddenly as he had begun. We walked back to the hotel in silence, along the bank of the murmuring stream, past the laughing waterfall.

We shook hands, and I said good-bye. The somewhat ramshackle taxi which had brought me was waiting. As I was entering it to drive to the station the old Scottish driver, pointing with his head to a group of sailors from the *Orzel* who were just entering the drive, said: "Fine fellow, these Poles—I hope they will get their country back!" "They will," I said, before closing the door.

The O.R.P. *Orzel* did well all through the Winter. In the Spring of 1940 she was in the Skagerrak on the day when the Germans launched their invasion of Norway. It was the *Orzel* which fired the torpedo that sank the German troopship *Rio de Janeiro*, with three thousand German troops on board. The *Orzel* continued to sail the seas until a day came when she was reported overdue. . . . "Overdue, presumed lost."

THE DEATH OF A DESTROYER

*as told by* LIEUTENANT L——

*to* F. B. CZARNOMSKI







WE SAIL FOR BATTLE



THE DESTROYERS "GROM" AND "BLYSKAWICA"

## IX

### THE DEATH OF A DESTROYER

THE O.R.P. *Grom* was one of the largest and most powerful destroyers in the world. She was built for the Polish Navy as a flotilla leader by Messrs. Samuel White & Co., Cowes, I.O.W., and completed in 1937. She had a displacement of 2,440 tons, and carried a complement of 11 officers and 185 men. At the outbreak of the war, on September 1st, the *Grom*, together with other units of the Polish Navy, succeeded in escaping from the Baltic in the face of overwhelming German forces, and after crossing the North Sea she reached British waters, and joined the British Navy, at whose side the Polish destroyers continue to fight against the common enemy.

At 9 p.m. on May 2nd, 1940, while lying at anchor in the Bogen Fjord, the captain of the O.R.P. *Grom* received a wireless order from H.M.S. *Aurora* to proceed to Narvik, in order to relieve O.R.P. *Blyskawica*, which had been damaged while on patrol.

By midnight the O.R.P. *Grom* met O.R.P. *Blyskawica* and received a report on the situation. O.R.P. *Blyskawica* had been damaged by four hits from anti-tank guns mounted on shore. Three of the hits pierced the engine-room and damaged the boiler, while the fourth shattered the deck.

After leaving her sister-ship, O.R.P. *Grom* proceeded to take over the area which she was to patrol. When the order for action was given by the captain, the *Grom* sailed towards the far end of the Rombaksfjord, reconnoitring the enemy gun emplacements on the shore. This done,

the Polish destroyer returned to the entrance of Rombaksfjord, from which she continued to watch the shore.

On May 3rd, at 4 a.m., O.R.P. *Grom* again proceeded towards the far end of Rombaksfjord, and after five minutes' sailing was hit on the starboard side by a 75 mm. shell, which damaged an oil-tank and one of the boilers. It appeared that enemy guns were mounted in positions concealed by the detached houses on the shore. These positions the *Grom* proceeded systematically to destroy. During this preliminary bombardment the 75 mm. gun and two anti-tank guns were destroyed.

Several raids by enemy bombers were observed, and the anti-aircraft defences were made ready for action. During the rest of the day enemy positions discovered close to the town were successfully bombarded.

The *Grom* spent the night at the entrance of Rombaksfjord, observing enemy movements on shore. In the early morning of May 4th new positions, consisting of two gun emplacements, barbed wire entanglements, and trenches occupied by enemy troops were discovered, and the captain of the *Grom* decided to cross Rombaksfjord and to destroy them.

Soon after 8 a.m. an air-raid warning sounded. The range-finders discovered two enemy bombers at a height of 8,400 feet. Almost at the same time the officer in charge of the anti-aircraft battery reported an enemy bomber directly over the *Grom* at a height of 16,750 feet.

The plane, one of the Junker type, released a salvo of six bombs, two of which hit the *Grom* amidships; an extraordinary coincidence, in view of the great height from which the enemy plane attacked the destroyer.

Immediately after the bombs hit their target the ship was still on an even keel, but the captain had scarcely time to rush to the starboard, in order to inspect the situation at the stern, when he noticed a burning lifeboat

## THE DEATH OF A DESTROYER

and a smaller fire on the deck, where a cloud of steam hid the entire stern. At that moment the ship heeled violently to starboard, and in view of the danger of immediate sinking the captain issued the order from the bridge: "The ship is sinking—abandon ship!"

The *Grom*, which was literally broken in two, sank with extraordinary rapidity. According to British observers who witnessed the occurrence from their own ships, the Polish destroyer sank in less than two minutes. Subsequent depositions of members of the crew established how the *Grom* was hit by the bombs. It was one of those unlucky hits, which reach a vulnerable part of a heavily armoured ship and destroy it at once. There was no time to do more than cast off two small rafts carried on the afterdeck.

The crew behaved throughout with exemplary discipline, and before jumping into the water the men made sure that the order to abandon ship had been given by the captain. They were in the water for about forty minutes. During this time they were machine-gunned by the Germans from the shore; nevertheless, they succeeded in placing all the wounded on the rafts.

The British ships immediately came to the rescue. The Polish sailors were rescued by H.M.S. *Aurora*, *Enterprise*, *Folknor* and *Beduin*, and were put on board H.M.S. *Resolution*. During the rescue and afterwards the British treated their Polish comrades with the utmost cordiality and did everything possible to help them.

While a report on the shore positions of the enemy was made to the captain of H.M.S. *Resolution*, the entire medical staff of this ship, together with the Polish doctor rescued from the *Grom*, attended to the wounded and performed all urgent operations.

The rescued members of the *Grom's* crew were removed to the North, where they were taken on board O.R.P.

## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

*Burza*, and then transferred to the hospital ship H.M.S. *Atlantis*, which during the next forty-eight hours was bombed ten times from the air.

The casualties suffered by the *Grom* numbered 1 officer and 58 sailors killed and 1 officer and 23 sailors wounded. Ultimately the survivors were taken by H.M.S. *Monarch of Bermuda* to Glasgow. One of them, Lieutenant L—, told the story of his finest hour :

“On the evening of May 2nd O.R.P. *Grom* received the order to relieve O.R.P. *Blyskawica* on patrol off Narvik. The *Blyskawica* had been damaged by four hits from a German land battery and was in need of slight repairs.

“The task of the destroyers on patrol off Narvik was always the same: to hamper the movements of the German troops, to cut their communications, and to intercept supplies arriving by sea or air, in order to prevent them from consolidating their position in Narvik. The attack from the land was being prepared, and the iron ring of the Allied troops was being drawn closer and closer round the German positions.

“The ships carried out their task so well that the Germans could make no attempt to regroup their forces. They could not even show their heads among the rocks, for every movement was immediately punished by the ships’ guns. I remember that we were given the additional task of locating and destroying the battery which had damaged the *Blyskawica*.

“May 3rd was Poland’s National Day, and we of the *Grom* resolved to celebrate it appropriately, although at 4 a.m. the *Grom* received her first wound. A shell fired from the shore penetrated the starboard side and struck the No. 1 boiler. That was for us the signal for action, and all day long the guns of the *Grom* continued to fire, destroying every part of the German shore positions within range.

“In the afternoon we discovered the German battery

## THE DEATH OF A DESTROYER

which had probably been responsible for the damage to the *Blyskawica* the day before. When the wind blew away the smoke of shell-bursts and uncovered the cleverly camouflaged positions, we could see the débris of the German guns littered about the ground by the tremendous force of our fire.

"The morning watch on May 4th was equally busy. The sun was just appearing from behind the mountains, and in its sloping rays we could see many interesting details on the German shore: two new guns, a few barbed wire entanglements, and to the left of these machine-gun emplacements on an innocent-looking hill. The captain decided that battle orders would be given soon after 8 a.m., when all our guns would pound away at the newly discovered objectives.

"When I was being relieved from my watch one of the British sailors who were acting as signallers on the *Grom*, after his usual 'Good morning, sir,' said:

" 'It's a fine day for air attacks—the sky is unusually clear.'

"I looked about me, thinking: 'Well, it's just the same as yesterday; the sunlight is uncannily, incredibly beautiful, the mountains are as white as ever, the water in the fjord just as calm as always.'

"And I went below for breakfast.

"We hurried through our meal, eager for the new day, which promised to be an exciting one. The air-raid alarm which blared out as we were breakfasting made no particular impression on us.

" 'They won't trouble to bomb us,' someone observed, 'when they have such a tempting target as a battleship and two cruisers!'

"But he had hardly spoken when the whole ship was shaken by a terrible shock, or rather by a series of rapid and successive shudders.



"I tried to leave the mess, as usual, by the door leading amidships; but the gangway was full of steam, smoke and flames. I hurried through the men's quarters in the fo'c'sle. Some of the ratings were already jumping into the water from the bow.

"I did not yet realize the seriousness of the position. One had such a strong, unshakable faith in the ship which had so long been our home, our country, all that we possessed. Nevertheless, it was evident that something terrible must have happened to our *Grom*, because she was listing more and more on the port side.

"It is impossible to analyse one's thoughts at a moment when everything which has hitherto represented the very foundation of one's life, one's ambitions, one's plans for the future is suddenly annihilated. At such a time one's mind seems to work in subconscious flashes. Such a flash carried me to my allotted position on the raft amidships.

"The list was increasing; the damage must have been terrible. The stern was soon invisible, and everything was hidden in smoke and steam. From under the clouds of steam, from a burning lifeboat, bleeding men were crawling away as we cast the raft into the water.

"Again some impulse carried me towards the stern, on the port side, climbing rather than running, as the ship slowly turned over on her beam.

"After that I remember only my frantic efforts to keep swimming in the icy water, to move away from the ship without getting frozen to the bone.

"The vast, red, graceful stern of the ship was now reared up vertically. The bows, completely separated, were also standing out of the water. Then the two portions began to approach each other like the jaws of a monstrous pair of pincers.

## THE DEATH OF A DESTROYER

"They closed with a terrifying crash, and a moment later everything had disappeared.

"On the surface our men were struggling in the water. From the shore the Germans were firing at us with machine-guns, while far away in the distance, at the seaward end of Rombaksfjord, appeared the tiny silhouettes of the British ships that were hastening to our rescue. Swimming would have been quite comfortable but for the filthy oil, the smell of burning, and the drifting gas that threatened to poison us. But otherwise it was really quite jolly in the water. The boys of the *Grom* behaved splendidly. Here indeed was comradeship. They were offering one another lifebelts, and were ready with mutual advice. Some were whistling a tune, while others, who were swimming close together, were having a friendly chat.

"The groans of the wounded could also be heard, but all of us, wounded and unharmed, had faith in the brotherhood-in-arms that united us with the British Navy; and the whole world knows that no British ship would ever willingly leave drowning comrades on the sea of battle. The men of the cruiser *Aurora* and the destroyers *Folknor* and *Beduin* pulled us out of the water.

"It was not an easy matter. The ships had to stop way in order to launch the boats. The whole work of rescue takes a long time, and the rescuing ship surrenders its most important means of anti-air-raid defence: rapidity of manœuvre.

"From the sunlit skies bombs might have shattered them as they had shattered us; but one thing they could not break: our bond of brotherhood-in-arms with the British Navy. I doubt if it ever struck the commanders, officers and men of the *Aurora*, *Folknor* and *Beduin* that their deed of mercy became an act of heroism. They were probably simply thinking: these are our comrades—this

is our job. And to-day each shipwrecked sailor from the *Grom*, while he thanks them in his thoughts for the life they saved, has the same feeling. These are our comrades-in-arms, with whom it is worth while to fight, and if need be to die.

"It was some time before we reached England, but wherever we went on these British ships we met with so much friendship, kindness, care, and forethought that mere words are insufficient to express our heartfelt gratitude.

"During our many transfers from ship to ship—it was a time when we were being bombed almost uninterruptedly—an incident occurred that stamped itself on my memory.

"We were just being transferred from the battleship *Resolution* to our Polish O.R.P. *Burza*. The entire Polish crew, with the officers at their head, were drawn up on deck. Under the muzzles of the gigantic guns the ship's band took up its position. The *Burza* moved away. We were standing on the deck, feeling rather miserable and uncertain of the future as we took our last farewell of the ship on which we had received so much heartfelt kindness. And suddenly the crew of H.M.S. *Resolution* stiffened in salute as the band struck up the mighty hymn: 'While yet we live Poland shall not perish!'

"Together with the melody of the national hymn I seemed to hear its words, which on the lips of these British sailors sounded like a solemn oath:

" 'While yet we live Poland shall not perish!'

"Our eyes were wet, but our hearts were throbbing with a new sense of power, with the promise of life.

"And thus to the long list of the battlefields on which the Poles have shed their blood, fighting for the freedom of nations, another has now been added in the far North, beyond the Arctic Circle: Narvik.

## THE DEATH OF A DESTROYER

“Together with our ship, one officer and fifty-eight men of the crew of the *Grom* gave their lives there.

“Surely their souls will be with us on our new ship. We shall still fight together for the cause, which lives for ever. It is more than the cause of Poland, or the cause of England. It is the cause of human liberty.”

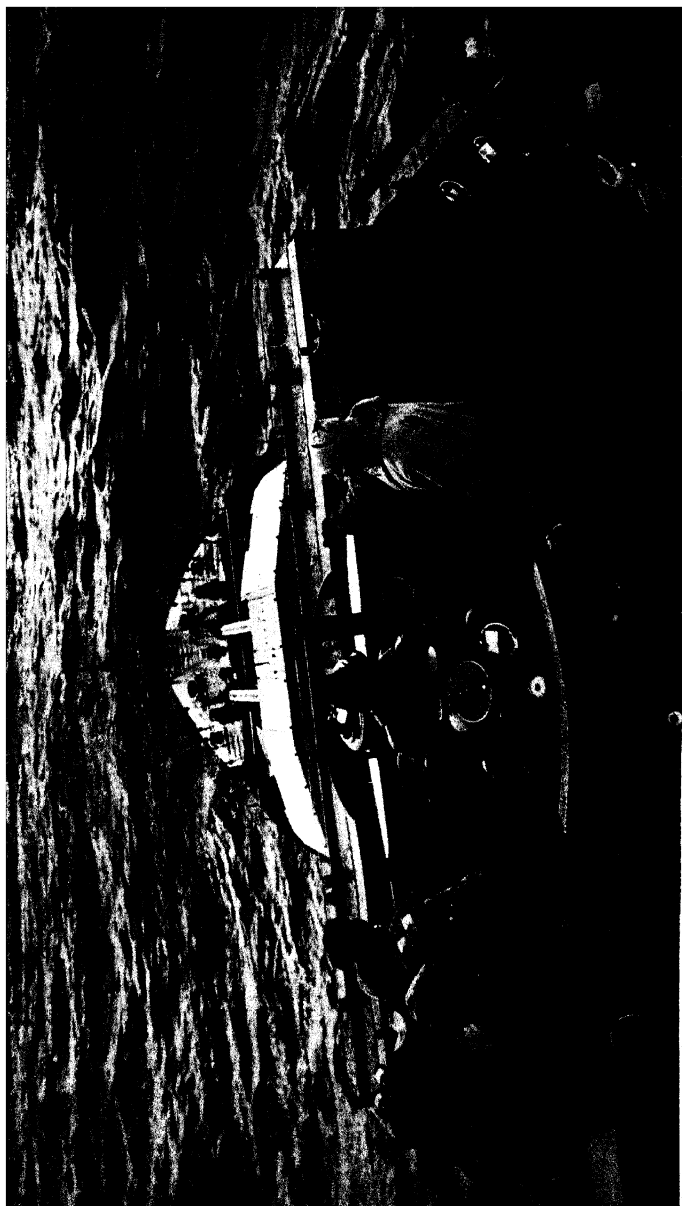


# EIGHT DAYS IN A LIFEBOAT

*as told by*

M. BOHDAN NAGORSKI,  
Managing Director of the Gdynia-  
America Line, *to*  
F. B. CZARNOMSKI

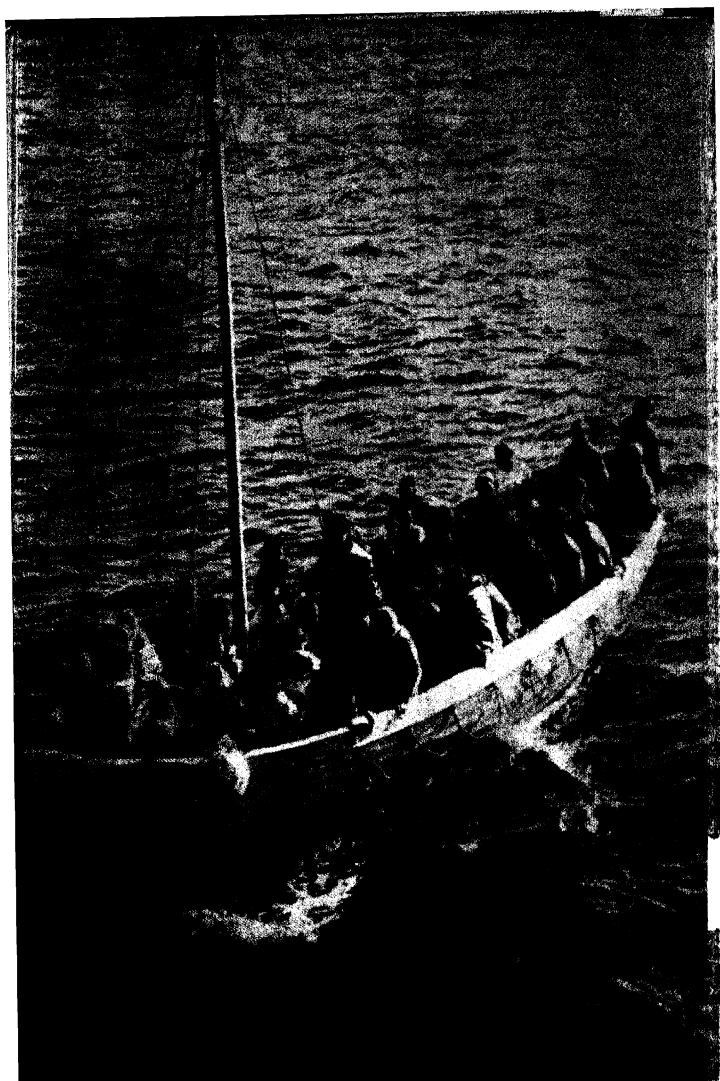




THE BRIDGE OF THE POLISH DESTROYER, "PIORUN"

*[Admiralty Photograph]*





THE "CITY OF BENARES" LIFEBOAT ON THE EIGHTH DAY

## X

### EIGHT DAYS IN A LIFEBOAT

THE *City of Benares* was a delightful ship. Built a few years before the war, she had no pretensions to the luxury of a *Queen Mary* or a *Normandie*, and even before the outbreak of war she had no ambition to turn a sea voyage into one long festival; but everything on the *City of Benares* was spick and span and fresh, the cabins were roomy and perfectly ventilated, and more important still, she was a steady ship, and neither by vibration nor by rolling in rough weather did she annoy her passengers.

Consequently everyone on board was in the best of spirits when on September 13th, 1940, after a rather prolonged wait in Liverpool, the *City of Benares* put to sea for Montreal, whence she was to proceed to New York and finally to the East Indies, her normal destination. The ship's crew was composed mainly of Lascars, who by their picturesque costumes and colourful turbans added a special note to the atmosphere of the ship.

In spite of the war the passengers represented many nations. There were a number of Englishmen and Canadians, most of whom were travelling on service, with Czechs, Hungarians, Frenchmen, Hindoos, and also a number of anti-Nazi Germans. The ordinary passengers numbered about a hundred, but in addition to these there were about a hundred evacuated children, aged from five to fourteen, who were accompanied by an escort of nurses, teachers, and a clergyman.

In this motley crowd there were only two Poles: Mr. Zygmunt Gralinski, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign

## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

Affairs, who was proceeding to the U.S.A. on a political mission, and myself. I expected to remain in Canada and the United States for about two months, in my capacity of managing director of the Gdynia-America Steamship Company.

The majority of the passengers—and not least the Czechs and ourselves—had already had some experience of war conditions; twice we had just escaped the German clutches, once in our invaded countries, and again in France, for after the collapse of the French armies we had had the greatest difficulty in getting out of the country.

It was not so much the immediate dangers from the air, in Poland, and then in France, and finally in England, as the sense of temporary helplessness in the face of the incredible acts of violence committed by the Germans in the occupied countries which had made the life of all Central Europeans, during the past year, so inexpressibly wearing.

In these circumstances, life on board ship, in spite of the dangers of the voyage, was full of ease and refreshment. The bracing sea air, the excellent cuisine, free of all war restrictions, the interesting company, the sports and games on the deck, and last but not least the absence of air-raid warnings and falling bombs, to which we had become familiarized during our last month in London, all contributed to the gaiety and well-being of the passengers. On the fourth day of the voyage a Czech journalist said to me:

“Don’t you think the voyage on this ship is something like a visit to a nursing home, especially for us, who are rather exhausted by our war experiences?”

I spent much of my time in a deck-chair on the after-deck, which was primarily reserved for the evacuated children. During the first few days many of them were

rather pale and depressed by seasickness, but once they were accustomed to the slight rolling of the ship the whole deck echoed with their shouts and laughter.

It goes without saying that everyone on board was aware of the lurking peril. We were always calculating the distance already covered, and the lessening danger of being torpedoed, as each day and hour found us farther from England. While we were still in Liverpool harbour Mr. Gralinski asked one of the ship's officers how he estimated the degree of danger.

"Well," he said, "until recently I was sailing daily on a small boat between Hull and London, on one of the most exposed routes, for nearly nine months. We were in almost constant danger, especially from German bombers, which frequently attacked us. And the little ship continues to sail unharmed to this very day. Here, on this route, the first two days may contain an element of danger, but afterwards we should be quite all right."

And now we had not two, but twice as many days and nights behind us. Our ship was still tied to the convoy, but as we had already left the zone regarded as dangerous the destroyer escorting us left, on the fourth day, to meet another group of ships proceeding from America to England, and to escort them home. Normally the *City of Benares* developed a speed of nineteen knots, but she had to reduce this while in convoy to keep pace with the slow-moving cargo-boats. We were moving at barely a fraction of our speed; but, on the other hand, the passengers consoled themselves with the thought that should our ship be torpedoed, we could be transferred to any of the other cargo-boats with which we were keeping company. However, on the following day, September 17th, we were told that the ship would soon be out of the danger zone and we all looked forward with eagerness to the more pleasant part of our voyage.

In the evening, after an excellent meal, I suggested to Mr. Gralinski that we should take a walk round the deck. It was pleasant to stroll about in the fresh breeze, and to gaze at the profiles of the other ships of the convoy, which were visible despite the complete blackout. We were joined by Colonel Baldwin Webb, M.P., a Hindu student of medicine who had graduated in India, and continued his studies in London, and was now going to New York for special research work, and a few other passengers.

About 10.30 p.m. Mr. Gralinski thought it was time to retire for the night, but I protested, jestingly, that there was no occasion for haste, for if we should chance to be torpedoed, it would be better for us to be on deck than undressed in our beds. Of course, I did not for a moment believe in the possibility of such a disaster, for according to the general opinion we were already out of the danger zone. A minute or two later I heard a sudden, violent crash, unlike any bomb explosion on land, but rather resembling the report of a revolver fired close to the ear, except that its force left me in no doubt that we had been torpedoed. Immediately afterwards I heard the sound of breaking glass, while the ship reeled with such violence that the shock sent me reeling away from my companion.

However, seeing that none of those on deck with me had suffered any harm, and hearing Mr. Gralinski's voice arguing with the others, and at the same time reminding myself that there was no time to be lost, I hurried to my cabin in order to pick up my warm fur coat and the diplomatic bag which I was to deliver in Washington. The cabin looked perfectly peaceful and home-like, with the bed made for the night, the table lamp alight, and all my trunks and suitcases tidily stored in the corner. I was sorry to leave all my things in this way.

In a flash scenes from my past life passed through my

mind. Twice before—like so many of my fellow-countrymen—I have thus considered all my earthly possessions before abandoning them to the enemy. Once in Gdynia, on the outbreak of this war, when all our ships, hurrying to get out of the Baltic, were sailing for the friendly shores of England, I had to leave my lovely cottage with everything it contained. For seventeen days I have made my way across Poland, constantly pursued by the Germans, and continually bombed, whether I was travelling in a railway-carriage or a motor-car or a peasant's cart. A brief visit to my mother's home in Naleczów, and I pressed on into Rumania, and so, across many frontiers, into exile, but a free man. The second time was in Paris, only a few months later, when the Teuton hordes were battering their way southwards. Again, in a Parisian lodging, I contemplated my now somewhat scantier possessions, trying to decide what I could pack into a suitcase before escaping to Bordeaux.

Here in this cosy, doomed cabin of the *City of Benares*, lying on a pile of more substantial luggage, was the same suitcase which I had taken away from Gdynia and carried with me until the fall of Paris. I considered for a while whether I should take that brown leather companion . . . and then I hesitated, reflecting that I already had the diplomatic bag on my hands. I took off my light overcoat, placed it neatly on the bed, put on my hat, and went up on deck, where all was darkness. On the way I noticed the Lascars rushing anxiously to and fro, while here and here the water was slowly coming in. I went straight to Lifeboat No. 12, which was assigned to my cabin, and found that a number of children, with their guardian, Miss Cornish, were already at the boat station, together with the fourth officer and a steward, who were to take charge of the boat, and a crowd of Lascars. But a number of passengers assigned to the same boat, Mr. Gralinski

among them with several of the children, were still missing. I remembered that during previous boat drills a greater number of boys than the six who were now present used to make their appearance. I asked the steward if the order to take to the boats had already been given, because during alarm drills we were told to assemble at the so-called mustering station. The steward replied that the alarm signal had been given, and that the ship might sink at any moment. I rushed to boat No. 11 on the opposite side of the deck to see whether Mr. Gralinski and the missing children were there. I found a small group of children, but none of the passengers for whom I was looking. The officer in charge invited me to join his boat if I liked ; but I preferred to stick to the boat to which I was assigned from the outset. The lifeboats No. 1 to No. 10 were on the upper deck, so that it would have been impossible as well as useless to search there. And I did not know which cabins were occupied by the children, as I had not been to the lower decks on which they were accommodated.

While returning to my boat I noticed that the explosion had torn a big hole in the deck. Probably a hatch-cover had fallen in, for immediately in front of me I could see a gaping abyss at the bottom of which I noticed the twisted outlines of a lift and other machinery, and already a quantity of water.

"That's more or less the lot," said our steward, as we stood by our boat on deck. "Not quite," I said ; "a number of passengers and many of the children are missing."

"I have been down twice already to fetch the children," replied the steward, "but I could neither see nor hear anyone, and now it's too late to go back once more . . ."

A few seconds later we were ordered to enter the lifeboat, which was already full of Lascars, and immediately afterwards the boat was lowered in a series of violent and

unpleasant jerks, until it touched the water, and was no less violently tossed about by the rough sea. The sailors who had operated the falls descended into the boat by means of rope ladders, and quickly pushing off the rowers pulled hard to get clear of the ship. As they did so we heard two further explosions, and we saw the flashes, about two hundred yards away. The enemy was apparently still at work.

The first thought which occurred to me when I took my seat in the lifeboat was that the boat had no chance of survival in such a sea, but when several waves had passed and the boat did not sink I felt reassured, thinking that it would be only a few minutes before we should approach and board one of the many other ships in the convoy. The steward, who was in charge of the food supplies on the boat, found the packet containing the night signals, and lighted a torch, which burnt with a brilliant red light, dropping many sparks. In addition to this torch we had our own pocket torches, with which we signalled, and we received signals from other boats.

Looking back towards the *City of Benares*, I saw that the upper deck was brilliantly lit by reflector lamps and noticed that she was settling down heavily by the stern. Suddenly the lights went out, the bows rose high out of the water, and then the huge hull vanished under the surface. All that we could do now was to find one of the other ships as quickly as possible; but we could see nothing. After a while we were approached by several of our shipmates who were clinging to a raft. We took them into our boat, and from them we learned that two of the lifeboats had capsized on being lowered.

In the meanwhile it began to rain, and I noticed that my companions in misfortune were shivering with cold. I now realized that I too was chilled to the bone. We therefore examined the lockers, where we found about



fifteen woollen blankets, which were immediately grabbed by the Lascars. We just managed to retain two or three for the people whom we had pulled out of the water a few minutes earlier. The children were the worst off, as they had no outdoor clothes. They were already asleep when the ship was hit, and they had rushed on deck in pyjamas and light overcoats. Of the six boys between the ages of seven and fourteen, three had no shoes on. Miss Cornish, who was in charge of the children, was as scantily dressed, while Father O'Sullivan, who was lying on the bottom boards, was barefoot and had only his pyjamas on. It seemed to me that if we had to spend the night in the boat it would go very hard with some of us. Nevertheless, both the children and Miss Cornish were perfectly calm, and we discussed the practical problems arising out of our position. I tried to cover the bare feet of the three boys who were sitting in front of me under my fur coat, but this was not easy, as we all had to row in turns, and the boys could not sit for long with their legs up. For a time a lifeboat from another torpedoed ship came quite close to us, but we never saw any of the other lifeboats from the *City of Benares*.

Slowly the long, long hours of this night of terror passed. We kept warm by continuous rowing, and we were sustained by the hope that in the morning a plane would appear in answer to the wireless S O S which the *City of Benares* had sent out before sinking. The hour before dawn was the coldest. The steward found among the stores a bottle of brandy, and we all had a few blessed drops. Owing to the cold and the nervous tension the majority of the crew were seasick.

With the break of day the sea calmed down a little, and for the first time we could examine the boat and take stock of our resources. One of the sailors found a tarpaulin, with which we sheltered the children from the

rain. Soon afterwards Purvis, aided by two of the Lascars, erected a hood over the bows of the boat, fixing the piece of tarpaulin over the semicircular iron hoops provided for that purpose. In this shelter we placed the children, Miss Cornish, and Father O'Sullivan. We also persuaded the Lascars to give up one blanket for the use of the children, whom we could then keep a little warmer. The waist of the boat was occupied by the Lascars, while in the stern were the white sailors, the fourth officer, Mr. Cooper, the steward, Mr. Purvis, the midshipman, Mr. Critchley, who was assigned to the *City of Benares* by the commander of the escorting destroyer, and, last but not least, the chief gunner of the *City of Benares*, Mr. Harry Peard, who was all over the boat, and whose energy and good-humour seemed to be inexhaustible.

Peard was the only one of the Europeans who could talk to the Lascars and sustain their spirits and strength. He promised them that a plane or destroyer was bound to appear before long; he made them row in order to keep themselves warm, and by his jokes he made us all laugh from time to time.

As the escorting destroyer had left us about twenty hours before the sinking of the *City of Benares*, I expected that she would return some twenty hours later, as she must have picked up our S O S. Afterwards I learned that by this time the destroyer was already escorting another convoy, which she could not leave. But in the meantime, as no plane had appeared, I fondly hoped that before the day was out the destroyer would return.

All this time we were slowly moving eastwards with the wind. The nearest land was six hundred miles away. About 11 a.m. Purvis busied himself with preparing our first meal. From one bag he produced sea biscuits, and from another corned beef. He counted out eight biscuits for the children, Miss Cornish and Father O'Sullivan,

thirty-two for the Lascars, and another six for the rest of the passengers. On each biscuit Purvis put a slice of corned beef, which he cut with his pocket-knife, and it was then passed from hand to hand, first to the children in the bow, then to the Lascars, and finally to our little group. This method of dividing up the food took nearly three-quarters of an hour, after which the water was distributed. The amount of water available was rather small, although larger than that required by the Board of Trade regulations. It was kept in two metal containers in the stern of the boat. The water was drawn up by means of a metal cup suspended on a chain. The cup, with the proper measure of water for each person, was handed round in the same sequence to the forty-seven occupants of the boat, and this too kept us busy for nearly an hour.

At 5 p.m. we had our second meal of the day, consisting of condensed milk and biscuits, again with a very small portion of water. There were several boxes of condensed milk, and we began by dividing one tin among every six persons. Towards dusk our hope of seeing the destroyer return began to fade; there was not a speck on the horizon. We resigned ourselves to spending a second night in the boat, and each of us tried to lie down as best he could, and as well protected against the wind and cold as possible. The Lascars lay on the bottom boards and covered themselves, head and all, with the available blankets, clustering close to each other for warmth. Miss Cornish placed the children under the tarpaulin hood, partly on a thwart and partly on the boards, on which Father O'Sullivan was already lying, chilled to the bone and motionless. I began to fear that he would not last another forty-eight hours. The English members of the crew were huddled together in the stern, while I sat among the Lascars. In order to keep my legs warm—for

my fur coat was much too short—I invited one of the Lascars to lay his head on my knees. He leaned his body against my legs and kept me wonderfully warm, so that for the first time I had a good few hours' sleep. I dreamt of home, forgetful of the ocean and the boat. All the more melancholy was my slow awakening, when the monotonous sound of the waves breaking against the hull of the boat reminded me of my condition. I opened my eyes, and high above my head I saw the glittering stars. The awareness of the infinite universe only deepened the consciousness of the gloomy reality of our position. I began to reflect that on the vast surface of the ocean the chance of meeting a ship was very slight, especially at that time, when all vessels were sailing in convoys, of which one had just passed westwards, while the next one would not leave England until a week later, and would then proceed, as did our convoy, on a zigzag course and by a changing route. There was just a chance that a convoy would be sailing from America eastwards, but could we expect to cross its course? From our low boat only a limited view of the surface could be obtained, and even that was further restricted by the high waves. I considered whether we could reach the coast of Ireland by our own exertions. The distance, as I have said, was about six hundred miles. I thought the most we could do would be to cover some fifty miles in twenty-four hours, so that it would take us twelve days to make land—with luck. Could we hold out for twelve days, and would the store of food and water last so long?

It then struck me that we might be making a terrible mistake in moving away from the position where our ship was sunk. Would it not have been better to remain on the fateful spot, hoping that a rescue ship would hasten to our assistance, or at least that one of the vessels of our convoy would return to pick us up? Or should we not

rather have turned westwards from the beginning, following our convoy on the assumption that one of the ships would at least stop and wait for the survivors? I reproached myself with not having spoken more insistently to the officer in charge of the boat.

At daybreak I went aft, jumping from thwart to thwart through the group of Lascars, in order to take counsel with Cooper, Purvis, and the others. Mr. Cooper told me that the officers in charge of the lifeboats received no instructions as to the direction which they were to follow in the event of the ship being torpedoed, but as a matter of general principle they would make for the nearest coast. He added that he thought it very probable that we should sight some vessel, either a freighter or a fishing-boat, on approaching the coast of Ireland. It was also quite likely that when we were nearer land a patrolling plane would sight the boat.

Anyhow, it was too late to reverse the decision already taken; we could not think of turning back. On the contrary, we must exert all our energies to press onwards. On the previous day we had stepped the mast, flying a distress signal in the form of a little flag. When we were looking for material for the flag, Miss Cornish, without hesitation, and before we were able to dissuade her, pulled down her pink chemise from under her frock, offering it for this purpose. The stiff westerly breeze made us regret the lack of a sail, which would have added so greatly to our speed; and then, searching the boat, we found under the bottom boards a rolled-up sail, which we hoisted after an irreparable loss of some forty hours. I was delighted to see the sail fill and feel the boat leaping forward smoothly and easily. At last we could rest from rowing, of which we had all had more than enough. We prepared to pass another night in a more cheerful spirit.

Just as the sun was about to set I saw in the eastern

sky, straight ahead of us, two great semicircular rainbows, like portals opening into another and happier world.

On the following day the wind continued favourable, and all felt more cheerful as the little boat moved steadily forward, and even Father O'Sullivan, no longer looking like a corpse, rose from his recumbent position and moved about the boat, saying that he was getting used to the bitter cold. The children too appeared from their shelter, their little faces bright in the morning sun. Only little Short, a boy of eight, was still downcast, grieving for his six-year-old brother, who was lost in the rush of the children when the ship was torpedoed, and never reached our boat. The torpedo struck the boat close to the part in which the children were accommodated, so that the light was cut off, and the water poured in immediately, while the gangways were blocked with broken timbers. Father O'Sullivan told us that the doors of the cabin in which two of the boys were sleeping became jammed, so that he had to pull them through a hole in the wall into the neighbouring cabin, and thence along the gangway to the deck. Purvis informed us that he had twice gone down into the children's cabin, but could find or hear no one.

I tried to console young Short by telling him that his brother might have got into another lifeboat, which was luckier than our own in being rescued earlier. I also hoped that my companion, Gralinski, who always used to say that he could trust his instincts, had already been rescued, and was now enjoying the comfort of another ship, while we were still roaming the ocean. One of the Lascars confided his troubles to me: he was sorry that the captain of the *City of Benares* was not with us, as he doubted whether such a young officer as the one in charge of our boat could be trusted to bring her safely into port. The Lascar felt sure that the captain had already

been rescued. It was only after we had landed that we heard that both the captain and Mr. Gralinski, as well as the younger Short, had gone down with the ship.

Our little boat sped on, and the sail proved its worth, but unfortunately the wind increased, and the waves rose with it. The sea was now like a rugged landscape, and when a mountainous wave swiftly approached the boat it seemed almost impossible that we should still be afloat when it had passed. When one of the largest waves broke over the boat we were all drenched, and we shipped a great deal of water. We at once took turns with the Lascars to bale the boat with a pail. The wind became so violent that we had first to reef the sail and then to haul it down, when we had to take to the oars again in order to prevent the boat from broaching-to. In the end we had to throw out the sea-anchor with which the boat was equipped. This was like a small tarpaulin parachute, which, being towed behind us on a long line, acted as a kind of brake, preventing the stern of the boat from swinging round. Under these circumstances we could only drift, and had to be content with keeping the boat afloat. From our experience of the last few days we knew at least that the boat was seaworthy.

Next morning we were able to hoist the sail again and continue our voyage. The sun broke through the clouds, so that at last we could dry our clothes and get a little warmer. Our spirits and hopes rose again. I thought that as we had lasted three and a half days in spite of rain and storm we might hope to hold out for twelve. The horizon was still hopelessly vacant. And it was curious to note how we gradually began to forget the need of keeping a lookout in all directions, so absorbed had we become in the task of working the boat. None of us had much faith in the possibility of a miraculous encounter, and we preferred to do our utmost to accelerate our progress.

However, the sea still had unknown dangers and surprises for us. On the fourth day, while we were resting and basking in the sun, the vast back of a whale emerged for a few seconds, barely ten yards from our boat. Submerging again, it reappeared astern. A few hours later another glistening giant passed in the distance, and I wondered what would happen if such a monster should accidentally rub against our boat.

The following night we passed through another unpleasant experience. It was pouring with rain, and the Lascars had all crawled underneath the tarpaulin hood. The sail was set, as the breeze was favourable and the sea not too rough. Suddenly, however, the downpour increased, and soon turned into a heavy hailstorm. Before we had realized what was happening the bottom boards were awash, for the rain and hail were running down the sail. We hurriedly lowered the sail, but in the darkness the boat seemed already to be listing heavily. I felt sure that this time we were sinking, and my companions in the stern of the boat had the same belief, probably because the stern was lower in the water.

All this time the Lascars were asleep. Cooper and Critchley also were sleeping under a piece of tarpaulin. Together with Gunner Peard, I began to bale. A Lascar woke up and helped us. Peard would not wake the other Lascars, because, according to him, there was no discipline in the boat, and these apathetic Orientals would rather drown than rouse themselves to make an effort. We emptied over forty pailfuls. As a matter of fact, the work was done by Peard, with very little help from me. When I noticed that he was getting tired I resolved to wake up Cooper and Critchley, who were furious with me, as they had only just fallen asleep. Cooper thought—no doubt with good reason—that the boat would not sink so easily, and that our fears were unjustified. So we decided to give



up baling, especially as there was not much water left in the boat.

The fifth day promised well again, for the wind was favourable and we forged ahead, sailing due East. Nevertheless, we were rather anxious, for the wind was stronger than we liked, and the sea was growing rougher. I was worn out, and somewhat depressed after the strain of the past night, and at 5 p.m. I got under the children's hood in order to lie down for a short rest. I had hardly relaxed when excited voices shouted "Ship in sight!" At first we were incredulous, for we had had too many such cries, and wishful thinking evokes mirages of non-existent ships. However, the keen-eyed Lascars persisted that this time there *was* a ship. Someone put his head inside our shelter and told us that a ship was actually sailing in the direction of our boat, and judging by the angle of her course she was bound to meet us. I overcame my fatigue and came out of the shelter. There—not more than six or seven hundred yards away—was a large freighter, and our boat was sailing straight towards her. There was a great commotion in the boat as everyone made ready to leave it. We dismantled the shelter and put our lifebelts on. We told the Lascars to form files in the centre of the boat, lest they should stampede to one side in their excitement. The ship began to loom larger, and we were now able to distinguish her outlines in detail. I called out to the group of passengers who were screened by the sail, urging them to signal continuously. I myself looked for some coloured rag that I could wave, but could find nothing at hand. Beside me stood Father O'Sullivan, Miss Cornish, and the six little boys, who were in raptures at the sight of the ship. It seemed that her engines were stopped, and it looked as though she was waiting for us to approach. I was wondering why she did not come closer to us. Suddenly I saw heavy smoke coming from

the funnel, and she began to turn as though intending to come alongside. But then, with a sinking heart, I realized that she was not approaching us; on the contrary, she was definitely though slowly growing smaller and smaller. No one would believe me at first, but after a few minutes no doubt was left that the freighter was rapidly moving away from us, following a northerly course, and at last she vanished beyond the misty horizon. With heavy hearts we returned to our places, to the great disappointment of the children, who, for the first time since the disaster, cried a little. We tried to console them by explaining that the sea was too rough for us to board a ship, and that anyhow it might have been a German ship; and the children all agreed that it was better to continue our precarious existence in the lifeboat than to be captives in German hands.

Soon after the disappearance of the freighter the strong westerly wind increased to gale force. We had to lower the sail hurriedly and cast the sea-anchor. This night was the hardest of all, not only because of our disappointment, but also because of the continuous struggle with a raging sea in the drenching rain. Even the little tarpaulin shelter gave no protection to the children, and there was so much water underfoot that they were unable to lie on the boards, but had to be transferred to the thwarts, where they shivered in the rain and the piercing wind. At dawn, when all fell asleep, I observed to Harry Peard that the wind had quieted sufficiently for the sail to be set again. I felt that we had no more time to waste, and there seemed no chance of meeting another ship in this desolate sea, so that we must henceforth rely solely on our own exertions. To increase our speed we put the Lascars to the oars in addition to setting the sail. Thus we spent the whole day and the whole of the sixth night. We once more encountered a number of whales, but no one paid

any attention to them. During the twenty-four hours we must have covered at least a hundred miles; but the next morning we were all utterly exhausted, owing to the efforts of the previous day. Our faces were drawn and even emaciated, our lips dry and cracked, our eyes feverish with the thirst which began to torment us. The weather improved—in fact, it was a lovely, bright, sunny day, but unfortunately the wind lost all power, and owing to lee-way we were drifting southwards. The Lascars lost what little spirit was left in them, and we all became irritable and ill-tempered. At dawn one of the Lascars fell into the sea and was drowned. Others began to make violent demands for water, and we had to keep them away from the water-tanks. On the whole, however, I must say that the Lascars behaved very well, and apart from a few mutinous spirits they were very loyal to us. To quiet them, and to make at least some appearance of relieving their sufferings, I took from the medicine-chest—which, unfortunately, contained little but first-aid material—a bottle of tincture of iodine, and following a happy suggestion made by Father O’Sullivan—which he himself was too exhausted to carry out—I covered with a thin film of iodine the feet of all those Lascars who had no shoes. Their feet were red and swollen and covered with sores. I was richly rewarded by the delight with which these poor children of a sunnier land received this really trifling aid, and I spent nearly two hours in painting their feet with iodine and massaging their legs. I had to go to each of them in turn, as apart from a few tougher individuals they were too weak to get up. It may be that this effort was even more beneficial to myself, as it made me forget the tormenting anxiety which was creeping upon me, and gave me the conviction, or perhaps the illusion, that I could still be of some use to my fellows.

In the evening, soon after we had put the children to

sleep, one of the boys was seized with an attack of madness. He threw off his clothes, shrieking, and tried to leap on to a thwart. He was the oldest of the boys, about fifteen years of age. He was uttering such terrible cries that the startled Lascars, who usually tried to keep close to us, moved away as if in fear that they too might be seized by the same evil spirit. We did our best to keep the boy properly covered. Miss Cornish, despite our protests, took off her jacket and remained in her thin blouse, while I put my warm fur coat over the boy. But it was useless, as he threw off everything. It was Harry Peard, as usual, who found the most practical solution. He fettered the boy's arms and legs with a piece of cord, and thus immobilized he soon fell asleep.

On the following morning—the morning of the eighth day—the sight revealed by the first rays of the rising sun was pitiful in the extreme. We Europeans presented a fairly hideous spectacle, but the Lascars resembled corpses rather than living creatures. The worst seemed to be happening, for it appeared that Steward Purvis, in his optimism, had miscalculated the amount of drinking water, and all that was left was just one portion each. It was decided that no water would be issued for lunch, and that the usual measure of water—the last one—would not be served out until the evening. By contrast with our own state the sun overreached himself in splendour, and this was the finest of all our days in our forlorn craft. The sea was calm, and with no wind blowing the boat scarcely moved. We tried to row, but the Lascars had no strength left even to hold an oar.

The sick boy got up and behaved quite normally, although he was still feverish. The sun was getting hot, and Miss Cornish suggested that we should unlace the tarpaulin hood so that the children could enjoy the full power of the autumn sunlight.

While we were finishing our daily meal, which consisted of the usual ship's biscuits—which we could now hardly eat, owing to our thirst—with a small portion of tinned pear and, more important still, a certain amount of pear juice, all of a sudden one of the boys shouted that an aeroplane was approaching. We were loth to believe it, but after a few seconds we did actually see a strange dark pin-point just above the horizon. Less than a minute later all doubt was dispelled, for we saw that an aeroplane was really flying straight towards us.

In a moment we prepared two little flags, taking the coloured turbans from the heads of the two nearest Lascars and fastening them to strips of deal split off the box of condensed milk. Critchley, who was a signaller in the Navy, stood on a thwart, and, supported in this position by Peard, waved the S O S. The aeroplane, which was by then circling overhead, proved to be a Sunderland Flying Boat. It circled quite low over our boat, signalling back to us with a mirror lamp, confirming Critchley's signal. When our identity was established the Sunderland made an attempt to come down on the sea, but for some reason could not manage this, and in a further series of signals it promised to send a destroyer. We deduced from this that we must be very near land, and we were rather proud of having covered so great a distance by our own exertions. The Sunderland made off, but barely two minutes later two other seaplanes appeared, dropping a bag of food attached to a lifebelt, and a smoke signal, which would make it easier for the destroyer to find us should night fall before she arrived.

We resolved to enjoy a farewell banquet in an hour's time, but unfortunately we found that we had not been supplied with water, the thing we needed most. Nevertheless, we were quite overcome by the abundance of tinned soups, vegetables, fruit and fish, and by the chance

of eating as much as we liked, instead of the laborious issue of microscopic portions.

We were just about to receive our last ration of water when a flying-boat reappeared on the horizon, followed soon afterwards by a destroyer proceeding at full speed to our rescue. The Lascars were in despair when the issue of water was cancelled in favour of the necessary preparations for our transfer to the destroyer. Several of them would not hear of the delay, and made a rush for the water tank, but we restrained them. Another minute, and our boat was rubbing against the grey hull of the destroyer, from whose deck a large net and several rope ladders were suspended. A number of bluejackets swarmed down into our boat, taking on their shoulders the children and most of the Lascars, who had not the strength to climb the ladders. Our little group of passengers managed to reach the deck unaided, but once on board we could not for some little time walk another step, as our legs were numb. Somehow we managed to get into the officers' mess, where we were entertained to tea which tasted like a heavenly nectar, while the Lascars were taken forward. Miss Cornish and Father O'Sullivan were accommodated in two officers' cabins, where they immediately turned in. The boys, except the one who was sick and had been put to bed, sprawled round the fireplace, having seized some illustrated newspapers, which they seemed to be enjoying as though nothing had happened.

When half an hour afterwards I went on deck, the sea was teeming with ships. I found out that we were still a hundred and eighty miles from land, and that our destroyer was escorting a convoy of numerous ships on their way to England, cruising round them like a sheep-dog protecting his flock from lurking dangers. We were right in the centre of the danger zone, but to me. and I

am sure to all my shipwrecked companions, the destroyer appeared to be the safest place under the sun.

During the night we left the convoy, and next morning we were able to appreciate the twenty-three knots which the destroyer was then making, and which made us realize how slowly our lifeboat had moved even in the strongest breeze.

About six o'clock in the evening we entered a small harbour not far from Glasgow, where we received an enthusiastic welcome from a crowd of reporters, press photographers, and cinema operators. We learned that we had long been given up for lost, as the passengers in other lifeboats from the *City of Benares* were rescued twenty hours after the sinking of the ship by a destroyer despatched for that purpose. As they were found to be in a state of utter exhaustion after barely a day and night, some of them even dying from exhaustion and exposure, no one had expected to see any of us alive.

In my innermost heart I never lost hope during those long, bleak days and still longer nights. Sometimes, when overcome with fatigue, I lost all sense of reality, and in my semi-conscious state I imagined myself to be sailing in an open boat on my native Baltic—sailing back into Gdynia harbour. There, on the hill overlooking the city and the port, an illuminated cross proudly marked the site selected for the Cathedral of the Redeemer, to be erected by my people as a thank-offering for liberty and independence.

And on the high altar of that cathedral I shall place my own votive offering in thanksgiving for the miracle of my rescue, when after the horrors of this war have been overcome I return to my native land.

THE STORY OF THE CABIN-BOY

*as told by* FRANEK

of the Motorship *Pilsudski*

*to* BOHDAN PAWŁOWICZ





## XI

### THE STORY OF THE CABIN-BOY

THE MS. *Pilsudski* was the crack motorship of the Polish Mercantile Marine. On the outbreak of the war the MS. *Pilsudski* was on her way from New York to Gdynia, but when the return to her home port became impossible she made for a British port and continued to serve the common cause as a transport ship. Towards the end of 1939, while approaching British waters, the MS. *Pilsudski* was sunk by mine or torpedo. The crew took to the boats, and all were rescued except Captain Mamert Stankiewicz, who remained on the bridge to the last. The story of his death has been told by Franek, the cabin-boy.

"There isn't much to tell," said Franek, when first asked to describe his experiences, "but my hair still stands on end whenever I think of what happened . . .

"I was asleep in my bunk in the fo'c'sle when the explosion woke me up," he continued, "but the next moment the collapsing bunk above hit me on the head and I lost consciousness. I came to only when the water, which was rushing in from the service gangway, had already reached the level of my bunk. All the other bunks were smashed, and the floor was holed in many places. I scrambled out and tried to find the doors, which were difficult to locate as the walls were also smashed, and in the darkness I was at a loss to know in which direction to move. While searching for a way out I heard a cry, and rushing in the direction from which it came I found a colleague, who had also been badly bruised. He had lost consciousness, and was only now recovering under the icy water. We were both trying to find the

direction of the gangway when a second explosion shook the ship, and we said, 'It is all over with us now.' The second explosion was much more violent than the first, but luckily we were thrown close to the gangway. The staircase leading to the upper deck was completely smashed, but by means of an iron girder we managed to scramble on to the deck and rushed to the lifeboat stations. There were no lifeboats! They had already been lowered, and in the distance we could see a number of tiny lights shining on the water. We began to shout, but got no reply. Suddenly we heard voices in the direction of the boom. We ran towards them and found the Captain and our ship's cook, Kawka. The ship was listing heavily to port, and we made ready to jump into the water to try to reach one of the lifeboats. The Captain ordered us to wait, because he thought the ship might steady herself. We waited a long while, but the list became even worse, and the Captain told us to cast a nearby bench into the water. We succeeded in lifting the heavy bench and throwing it overboard, but then none of us dared to take the plunge, although the Captain told us it was the only thing we could do to save ourselves. Seeing our hesitation, the Captain jumped first; my mate followed, and, crossing myself, I jumped after them. We reached the floating bench without any difficulty, but looking back the Captain saw that Kawka was still running up and down the deck without daring to take the plunge. The Captain ordered him to jump and join us. At the last moment, as the ship was sinking, he thought better of it and plunged into the water. We heard him crying out "Captain," and that was the last of him. Kawka was drowned before our eyes, and the Captain said how sorry he was.

"While we were floating on this raft, being tossed about terribly as the sea was choppy, the Captain was telling us

how he spent the previous evening. Then it started to rain, and a strong wind began to blow which at times rose to a storm.

"We continued to float on the bench, while the Captain was signalling to the motor-boat; but they signalled back that the engine wasn't working because of the high tide. The Captain told us that we must look to our own salvation and comforted us as best as he could, and then told us to pray, saying that the Lord would not abandon us. Meanwhile the storm was growing in strength, and the waves were drenching us with spray and tearing off pieces of the raft.

"My colleague could not stand it any longer and said to the Captain: 'Captain, you have a revolver; give it to me, for I cannot go on like this.' But the Captain said to him, 'This is a great sin. Life is precious.' All the time the storm was raging and beating us on the bench, and the Captain was getting weaker so that we had to hold him fast. He said that if he survived, he would never forget how we helped him. The storm was getting worse and worse and the sea more and more angry.

"All of a sudden a little light appeared gliding on the waves, and the Captain said, 'We are saved! This must be a destroyer!' I was anxious at first, thinking that it might be a German destroyer; but it turned out to be English. On board the destroyer they noticed us and were manœuvring to come nearer to us, when the waves carried our raft right towards the ship. Just when we thought we were saved the waves washed us off the raft into the sea, and a following wave drew us almost under the big ship. By a miracle we swam out of the whirl, and the destroyer's crew at once threw out ropes, which we tried to catch. . . . This was our last effort. Our limbs were weak and numb and becoming stiff, our bodies

sagged and floated exhausted, and this was the last I could remember.

"What happened after that I don't know, as I passed out completely, and it took them more than an hour to bring me round. When I recovered consciousness the first thing I could make out was that someone had died. As soon as I felt a little better I crawled up to the deck to see who had died, and it was our Captain. He lay there looking so changed. They tried a long time to revive him by artificial respiration."

Franek stopped suddenly. He looked at me with his sad blue eyes and flushed uncomfortably.

The first officer recounted the circumstances of the sinking.

"I took over the watch on the bridge at 4 a.m. Captain Stankiewicz turned in to have a short rest. We were sailing without lights and showed our signals only when passing other ships. Two look-outs were posted in the bows and on the mast. Just when I entered the steering cabin to show the lights to a ship passing us on the port side I felt a violent shudder pass through the ship, and there was an explosion in the fo'c'sle. After barely ten seconds there followed another explosion. The ship began to list heavily to port, and it seemed as if it would capsize at any moment. The engines stopped, and all the lights went out. At this moment the Captain rushed on to the bridge and gave the order, 'Abandon ship.'

"I tried the alarm bells, but they would not work. I called on the crew, who, alarmed by the explosion, came rushing on to the deck, to man the boats. The Captain went forward towards the boom. On his order, having put on a lifebelt, I went to the motor lifeboat 'A,' where the other members of the crew were already waiting in accordance with alarm orders. The majority of the lifeboats were already on the water. Having made sure by repeatedly

## THE STORY OF THE CABIN-BOY

calling out that no one was left behind, I lowered the motor-boat myself, which was not an easy task, as the ship was listing heavily, and I was the last to descend into it. It took us nearly an hour to get the engine going, and meanwhile we were drifting helplessly. Of the MS. *Pilsudski* not a trace remained on the rough surface of the sea."





A POLISH HURRICANE PILOT GETTING READY





A POLISH HURRICANE PILOT

**BUT THE SKIES WILL BE  
OURS AGAIN**

*as written by*

**C. G.**

*and transcribed by*

**F. B. CZARNOMSKI**



## XII

### BUT THE SKIES WILL BE OURS AGAIN

THIS is the story of the air battles fought in Poland during September 1939. A story of hopeless struggles against impossible odds. When at dawn, September 1, 1939, the *Luftwaffe* began the undeclared war against Poland by mass bombing raids on Polish cities, towns, villages and aerodromes, Germany employed over 3,000 warplanes against the 300 which Poland was able to put into the air. What this meant to the Polish fighter pilots is best told by one of them :

It was the second day of the war.

The mist lifted and the sun came out in all its glory, all its burning and hellish heat. For the last three weeks fire had been pouring down from the skies, just as now our blood was on fire. The pilots sheltered in the bodies of their PZL planes and thus shadowed, they watched the dazzling azure of the skies, tensely awaiting the enemy. All, except those on alarm duty, sat inside their overheated cabins in full flying kit, with parachutes attached and themselves strapped to the seats. They waited.

We were thirty pilots in all and we had twenty machines. We had lost one machine on the eve of the war and one, shot down over the front, lay buried somewhere near our infantry advanced lines. Those who had worked hard during the first day of the war were resting.

I was ordered to report to the Commander of our Group.

Our headquarters were established in the drawing-room of W—— Manor. On the table was a set of maps

with the necessary squared blueprint showing the sectors of the front near Lodz. I could hear the wireless operator in the neighbouring room repeating the words of the messages he was taking down from one of the observation posts reporting the raiding activities of the enemy.

"11.22 a.m. square 21-K—yes—many machines—flying low—through mist—unidentified."

Of course there must be mist there. It had only just lifted here.

Another post reported: 10.30—25-N. Visible—6—large—direction 73—enemy planes.

And after a few seconds: 10.33—26-N. Visible—6—large—75.

All this meant that the same planes were flying over the neighbouring posts, but that they had changed their direction. They were flying from the direction of Wielun. I seized the ruler and tried to measure the distances. In three minutes they had covered about 12 miles, in other words their speed was about 240 miles per hour. They were flying in our direction towards Lodz, and now it seemed they were making for Radom. We couldn't do anything. They were flying too far from us—we would not be able to catch up with them.

Another report, and after a few seconds another and yet another. Only now, at Headquarters, did I see and realize our helpless poverty. On the entire Lodz front we were alone—twenty fighters. Our maximum speed—some 180 m.p.h.; our armament—two machine-guns. These were our best machines for chasing and fighting. And theirs? On a slightly adapted Messerschmitt Bf 109, Fritz Wendel had beaten the world record the previous year, reaching a speed of 471 miles per hour. The mass-produced "Pencil" had a slightly slower speed, but was armed with a cannon and four machine-guns. And the Me 110? Speed over 350 miles, four machine-guns and

two cannon in front, two machine-guns in the rear. But all this wouldn't matter if we were not so few. If we only had more of our "Bees" but plenty of them. Our task was to defend the Lodz front, to lie in wait, to fly on patrols. To-day things were exactly as they were yesterday. We split up into flights of threes, even twos in order to cope with our tasks. But even if we were going up singly, one against a whole group of raiders, there would still not be enough of us. The Germans were making more raids than we had machines.

My brother artilleryman and infantryman! I was no longer surprised that you had shot down Jan over your position, and that you would shoot me down, if I flew over you, in your fear that a hail of bombs would fall on your poor heads. You were nearly blinded with the firing, and either you could not see our markings or you did not believe your own eyes. God! it was enough to drive one crazy.

And now telephone followed telephone. At last they were flying towards us from the South-West. A large number—said the reports—at a moderate height. I made calculations. The Major hurried me. They would be here in about seven minutes. Phone message to the aerodrome: All machines ready. Take the air and wait over the airfield at 14,000 feet. Another second, and we heard the roar of the first machine over our roof, followed by the second and third machine. I felt as bucked as if I were in my own machine. I didn't need champagne. It didn't matter whether England sent her Hurricanes or not. Nothing mattered now.

Report: They are still flying towards us.

Three other reports followed in quick succession, to the effect that one, then three were turning—then that many of them were turning eastwards. What the hell?

The Major sent another flight into the air. They

took off in a few seconds. The Major and the Operation Officer stared up, followed them with their eyes. What a joy to see our fellows tearing up the skies with such enthusiasm!

Another hum of machines flying low over our heads, and immediately afterwards a telephone message from the park. A flight returned from a rendezvous. They had had a job of work over the front and had exhausted their ammunition and petrol. New order: Refuel and recharge at once. Take up alarm station. The old flight will replace them at the front. Inform the flight which has just taken off that their task is to cover the first flight in their fighting.

Yes, sir.

There. Above the clouds we could hear the rattling of machine-guns. The first flight must have intercepted the Germans. We could hear the quick barking of the Teutonic machine-guns, the more fluid bursts from our machines, and the deeper crack of the enemy cannon. Sometimes all this noise ceased, sometimes it rose into a tornado. Finally artillery joined in the fray. They had obviously located the enemy. The heavy groan of a gun somewhere near the railway station, followed by a second and third. Then another salvo. After a few seconds the detonation of exploding shells came back from the clouds.

Roaring and thunder there and telephones here. I rushed to the verandah to have a look, but the fighting was going on above the clouds. Only the roar of the engines and the noise of the firing could be heard.

"There, there!" Major Jeziorowski pointed out.

"Yes . . . I see. Damn it! The battery must be crazy!"

Ah, now I could see them well. They emerge into the sunlit break in the clouds, covered with the puffs of A.A. shells exploding. They were fighting up there, and the battery went on firing.

"If they don't stop they will bring one of our fellows down."

"Sir, don't let us imagine—the worst!"

And up there, in the sky, the dog-fights were going on. A two-engined German which couldn't be easily identified from this distance tried to do crazy aerobatics to elude two of our "Beess," as the Germans called them. The third of our fellows was chasing another German. White streaks produced by the firing separated the adversaries. Long, straight streaks from machine-guns and thicker, snaky ones from the German cannon. Now and then they disappeared behind the tattered clouds or in the flaming cloudlets of exploding shells. The machines turned in crazy twists, or shot up in wide spirals or dived headlong downward only to burst upwards in a fine spiral.

The superior manœuvrability of our machines was obvious. We beat them hollow whenever they appeared even in overwhelming numbers to accept a combat. But in pursuit—we had to bite our fingers. They were miles ahead in speed and fire-power. Their bursts of two cannon and four machine-guns sounded like thunder in June. Our machines could only bark pitifully with their two machine-guns.

Suddenly, the uproar lessened. At last the A.A. battery had ceased fire. But up there the fighting went on, though there were fewer of them in that blue patch. One of ours and one of the Germans were missing. I didn't know where they were. I could not follow the fight all the time, yet I could not work on the maps and rushed to the verandah every few seconds. The Lieutenant was furious. "Go back to your maps. What the devil are you gaping at?" He pretends not to understand.

Perpendicularly from behind the clouds came the roar of engines and the rattle of guns. The chase went on, moving away . . . Hurrah! I clenched my fists with



joy and hatred. The German cut a freakish caper and fell straight nose downward. Our fellow dived close on his tail and stuffed him with his bullets. The Nazi's guns were silent and only his machine howled terrifyingly down the scale. They disappeared behind the trees in the park.

Another minute, and the machines prepared to land. One touched the ground gently, followed by another and a third and fourth. Was that all? No. One more machine appeared flying very low, circled round the airfield and landed. The sixth was missing.

We waited and listened. Nothing—silence. He probably went astray and is wandering about the sky somewhere. An individualist, apparently! The Major rang up the operational room. I was standing near the phone and could hear the replies.

"The Dornier is probably shot down."

"Yes. We shall verify it."

"Three machines are disabled. Two had their engines damaged by splinters from our own A.A. shells or the German guns. The third has a punctured fuel tank. The fourth hasn't returned yet altogether. Peter Ruszel is missing. He will be here in a minute probably."

But after thirty minutes, after an hour, two hours still nothing had happened. The Germans also kept away during the noon hours. Peter did not come back. It was only towards evening that he was brought back and carried straight to the morgue, to be debited to the A.A. battery.

Our real job started in the afternoon. The machines took off singly or in flights of threes, they landed and took off again. The mechanics must have sweated like hell to have everything ready in time. "Here's petrol, there's oil, and over there more ammunition! Quicker, quicker!"

And I had to sit there, over the maps. Damned annoy-

ing! At last Richard, who had just returned with his engine put out of action, agreed to take charge for me for a minute, so that I could swallow my lunch. I retired to the bedroom next door, where the orderly brought me a bowl of soup with a piece of meat, rice and a slice of bread. I sat down on the double bedstead which I shared with Zbyszek, and tried to force myself to eat. The tired voice of the telephone operator reached me even here. Something flying somewhere. I could only make out the words "nine" and "very high." What's the use of disturbing us with reports of an enemy who is flying past us perhaps sixty miles away? What can we do with our slow machines? But now I heard my deputy speaking:

"Sir, they are flying towards Lodz! Lodz!"

"It looks like it. They are a long way off. We'll wait and see if they do not change direction."

I grabbed my helmet and goggles from the bed and on tiptoe I slipped out of the room. No one noticed me. I had had enough of this free seat at my colleagues' performance!

On the runways work was going on feverishly to get the machines ready. Six were ready. Three were still in the hands of the mechanics, a few were damaged, the rest were somewhere at the front. Only with difficulty was I able to persuade a young corporal-pilot to get out of my machine. I checked up the ammunition, the air pressure, I strapped myself in and was ready. The others were ready too. We did not take off, because the raiders had changed direction.

But suddenly I saw that the mechanics were pointing towards the sky and shouting something. I see. They came from a different direction. Contact. Over. One, two, the propeller turned and began to revolve smoothly. On either side of me other machines were preparing to take off. Just as I pressed the accelerator, a mechanic

rushed in front of my propeller. I jammed on the brakes—what the devil? He signalled to me: Cut out! Was he mad?

But now the Commander of our squadron appeared in front of our flight, signalling with his arms for us to cut out the engines. I hit myself on the head and swore like all the devils. With equal fury I cut out the engine. The machine jerked, the propeller flew back and stopped. Next to me Thadeus in his machine did the same, then pointed upwards.

Now I could see. Nine Me's 109 flying about high above. They must have been at least 13,000 feet up. In the setting sun they glittered like sparks.

The mechanic and his assistant came running to my machine "What's the matter?" I shouted.

"I don't know."

They hurriedly pumped more air into my Vieth.

"Thirty-five atmospheres," I shouted again.

"It will burst, sir."

"Let it burst. Let the old cow burst, but it must jump to it when wanted."

Meantime the Me's were basking in the sun. We followed them with our eyes. The Commander peered into my cabin and demanded:

"Why are you trying to take off without orders?"

"What else was I to do?"

"Can't you see they've come to get us into the air. Can you see how high they are? If you take off they'll get you away and shoot you down, or you'll have to land without petrol or without ammunition. Then their bombers will attack our airfield and smash our squadrons to bits. Await orders, and when you've taken off, tune in the radio."

He added:

"The bombers are our prey. By taking on the fighters

we shall only crumble to bits and then the Dorniers will have it all to themselves."

"Yes, sir," I said, but I wasn't in the least convinced.

The Me's continued to sweep the skies without hindrance, though without doing any damage. At last I lost sight of them.

Suddenly the signal came "Start up!" Was it to be another alarm test or what? Now the Huns had got away! I contacted. The dear old cow jumped. Signal: Take off. I took off, joining the flight formation as I went. There were six of us.

I tuned in the radio.

Thadeus, Casimir—here Eva. Thadeus, Charles—here Eva. Direction Pabjanice. Gain height. From South-West a big bombing expedition. Repeat: Direction Pabjanice, etc., etc.

I climbed almost vertically, loading each machine-gun in turn. We flew towards the South-West. Our speed was low, but the machines were turned skywards, for we must gain height. Everyone of us concentrated. Six pairs of hands, six brains were working feverishly. Our eyes scanned the skies.

At last we discovered the enemy. They looked like Asiatic locusts. They were flying in mass formation, like a cloud, above them three flights, behind them another open formation. Two-engined low-winged monoplanes. Heavy Junkers bombers. Below them two flights of lesser breed and farther off another six flights, while here and there single Dornier "Pencils" were flitting about.

They were all much higher than we were. We continued to climb patiently. We wanted to reach those on top, but we were still below the lowest layer. They flew onwards, coming closer and closer, big and grey. Here were the Me's 110. They came with their noses upturned,

1,500 feet above us, as if they did not intend to take any notice of us and pass on.

With our eyes glued to their machines we press the controls, we hulled on the stick, only to get higher, to get closer. But our horizontal speed was falling off. Oh, you scoundrels—won't you come down, won't you fight us?

Yes, now they turned their snouts downwards and power-dived straight at us. We opened formation almost automatically. I was on the extreme right. One monster came straight at me. A burst of six guns blinded, deafened me. I returned the fire and turned on my wing. He flashed by and far below and behind me turned too.

Hurrah! We all had got behind and above them. They were below us. They couldn't power-dive again. They were probably pulling on the steering, their eyes bulging, their stomachs pressing upwards, their wings dripping with sweat. Yes, I knew how they felt!

I rolled on my back and added a semi-loop to make sure I got him. There he was, dead in the centre of my sight. I pressed the knob on the stick, the plane jerked nervously and the guns rattled fluently. My guns! His gunner was thundering at me. I clenched my teeth. I felt like a drunken man and all I could see was his plane. The greenish-grey monster and that predatory badge on the tail: the black fangs which filled my eyes. I released the knob, another correction of aim by the sight, another burst, and again the plane jerked with the discharge of bullets.

A mighty roar over my head brought me round. Hell! Six of them had got through into our *mêlée*. And above, the heavy ones were coming. They wouldn't dare descend into this hell. From below help was approaching. Two of our machines.

My prey vanished, turned again. The pilot aimed at

me from the port side, but I was not going to be slaughtered like that. Our tracer bullets crossed, those of his gunner and my own.

But . . . others too were coming in, a little from behind. Another was chasing me. If I fight this one, the other would chase me, so I turned on him, and left the other at my back. They passed from one end to the other like a couple of footballers their ball; I escaped from two guns to come up against six and then back to two again. I was getting hot. A third appeared right in front of my guns. I left the others and gave this one a burst. I passed close beneath him and foolishly got in the way of one of my colleagues who was filling the German with lead. I kicked the steering lever just in time to squeeze myself past. I pressed the knob again—no result. I try again. Ammunition exhausted.

I went down and landed. I shouted for ammunition while they pointed up to the bombers, which were about to attack our airfield. "Duck, everybody!" But Zuber hurriedly loaded my machine-guns. Thadeus was already starting with his guns reloaded. The bombs all fell into a newly ploughed field, some distance from the aerodrome.

I took off and climbed. This time I need not climb so steeply as the fighting was going on at a low height; all the same some advantage in height would help. I noticed that one of our fellows was hard pressed. He was pursuing one of the Germans, while two other Germans, quite close to him, were pumping lead into him. They must have got him, because he stalled and went straight down.

Another of our fellows was also attacked by two Me's. I dashed into the midst of all this *mêlée*. I tried to help first the one, then the other. My eyes shot glances in all directions, trying to catch up with all the changing phases of the fighting and to transmit the results to my

hands. My brains ceased to function. The process of thinking was too slow. My muscles reacted by instinct.

Suddenly a flash and a burst of fire. Christ! One of our machines was in flames. No. 4 was burning. It was Dzwonek. He had been on patrol; on his way back he decided to help us and now he was done for. Perhaps he could still bale out. But the flaming comet tumbled earthwards, leaving only a trail of smoke and fire. Suddenly the white flash of a parachute blossomed out. Thank God!

What's that? The Me's are firing at him? At his parachute? The dirty dogs. The curs . . .

Those nearest to him came to his assistance, but young Malinowski had already got the criminal and was giving him all he'd got. The German tried to escape the punishment, but fortunately he did not. In a few seconds all that was left of him were flying bits of wings and tail. Another German went down immediately afterwards and the rest made off. We came down and landed.

Dzwonek was alive. He had been taken to hospital, they told us. He had gone on patrol in the afternoon. About 4 p.m. he took off with Teddy Kramarski to catch the Heinkels which were coming loaded with bombs. But our men did not notice the Me's behind the Heinkels. The Me's came right in, and it was all over in a few bursts.

Teddy was shot down, but Janek succeeded in making his way home. But when he saw us engaged, he rushed in to help us though he was wounded in his hand and leg, and his machine too was holed. When his plane burst into flames he was already so weak that he did not even want to bale out. He no longer cared. The machine was on fire. So be it. . . . The earth wasn't far away. He might get burnt a little but one bump against the ground and that would be the end. No one would ever be able to identify him. But he had miscalculated—the earth was

farther away than he thought. The pain of burning in his face, his hands and knees drove him out of the machine. He was wounded and burnt, but he'd got a chance.

We had an argument with Teddy over that Messerschmitt. I tried to convince him that I shot it down. He maintained his claim. It is true that we were both stalking the Hun, but for the last two miles I was close behind him and he was flying with his port-side engine only. I knew I hit the pilot, because immediately afterwards he crashed headlong into the ground, and his plane blew up in bits while still in the air. It was only then that Teddy came up.

In the end I offered to share the claim. After that fight I felt so elated that I wouldn't have minded ceding him a few of the triple-deckers from the last war.

The next day, September 3rd, our squadron's bag was increased by two Henschels 126, which were shot down by Pretek and Urbanczyk over the front. The boys were crazy with joy.

I added a Ju 86 to the bag. There was nothing much in it. I got him by surprise. He was 15,000 feet up, while I was barely 8,000 feet up. Just as my radio blared the order for me to land, I caught sight of him in a blue patch among the clouds. I shouted into the mike: I've got him! and, leaving my flight, of which I was the leader, I stepped on the gas, keeping directly under him, climbing higher and getting closer all the time. Almost holding my breath for fear of scaring him off, I got into a perfect position. He noticed me only when it was almost too late. His gunner let fly with the gun, while the pilot opened the throttle full out in the attempt to escape. I gave him long bursts, one after another, patiently—though the distance between us was increasing. He was getting away. I am sure they must have been laughing at me, all four of them. They will have to be content



with that laugh for the rest of their lives . . . beyond the grave. I relaxed my grip and my clenched teeth only when he burst into flames. I shook off my sweat-soaked gloves. My machine climbed of itself, staggered about for a moment and then went down. I put my hands on the sides of the cabin, my head against the windscreen.

It was good to feel the breeze. . . .

September 4th brought retribution. Many of our machines were under repair. Several others were on patrol, and all except two went up for offensive sweeps.

About noon a Dornier appeared. Jeziorowski, who was on the airfield, jumped into his machine and off he flew. Zdzich followed him. They both gave chase and fired. The Dornier came crashing down. He had to crash. We could see Zdzich's tracer bullets streaming into him.

Ah . . . Messerschmitts 109 were coming. Our two fellows saw them and attacked the leading machine, while they themselves were attacked by all the other Me's. Two against nine. They separated the two Polish machines. Zdzich dropped out and all the Germans went for Jeziorowski. Forty-five guns against two.

He dodged about for some time. The Captain tried to help him over the radio, and apparently succeeded, but . . . Thadeus was already on the verge. Evidently his hand was searching for more strength in its muscles and failing to find it.

"Land! Land!"

He must have heard the order, he must have grasped it with his remaining consciousness, for he prepared to land across the furrows. But he did not make his usual elegant glide, and when they passed over him in a string vomiting fire one after another, he crashed tail up. From the fire we rescued a shrivelled mannikin.

They also burned out several of our damaged machines standing on the edge of the airfield.

That evening, in the hospital chapel, we bade farewell to Jeziorowski, Ruszel and Kramarski. They lay as though insensitive to their burnt legs, as though blind to their torn uniforms and ragged shreds of flesh.

The fifth day of war. We have no more first-line machines and our wireless station is smashed. In a few ramshackled machines we still take off against smaller fry. Singly. But the raiding forces are all very large now.

Now, a dull hum reverberates across the sky from afar. It comes nearer and grows more powerful. Pregnant with bombs, bullets, destruction and death. The hated, bestial monsters are flying on. Knights of the *Lebensraum*. Conquering new spaces of Europe on which to settle their slaves. This Poland of ours has never been ours really. It was theirs before they came from Asia, before it was Polish. So they say.

In the clearing, between the trees, we can see the vanguard of the raiders. We count them:

"Three, six, nine, twelve, fifteen . . . O Lord, it's enough to choke you . . . Twenty-seven."

They fly in flights of three extended in a long column, glittering in the brilliant sunshine.

My heart contracts with an aching hatred. . . . If only they knew its force, if they only knew how long we shall nurse this hatred in our breasts.

Apathy. Again the heart throbs with helpless fury, sobbing with rage, fear, and pain. The scoundrels are returning. Like thieves fresh from the victim. Their hand reeking with the blood of innocent men, women, and children. Maybe their apeish jaws are chewing gum now. And the sun deigns to shine on them. That accursed sun. With only their helpless, tired eyes can out-of-work pilots follow that caravan of bandits. They fly away undisturbed, indifferent. I cannot even throw a stone at them.





THE POLISH CREW OF A BOMBER ATTACHED TO A POLISH SQUADRON  
ENTERING THEIR MACHINE



LOADING THE MACHINE-GUNS OF A POLISH HURRICANE

MY LAST FLIGHT TO WARSAW

*as told by* PILOT OFFICER S. R.

*to* F. B. CZARNOMSKI



## XIII

### MY LAST FLIGHT TO WARSAW

THE city of Warsaw was already doomed. The whole territory of Poland was overrun by the Germans, who occupied the western half of the country, and by the Bolsheviks, who had seized the eastern half. The Polish Government, with thousands of officers and tens of thousands of soldiers, crossed into neutral countries rather than surrender, all animated by the desire to continue the struggle. After the Russians invaded Poland from the East on September 17th all the pilots of the Polish Air Force were ordered to fly their machines to Rumania, then still an ally of Poland. Among them was Pilot Officer S. R. of Warsaw. He had already been a few days in Bucharest when he was seized with an irrepressible desire to return to beleaguered Warsaw and to fight in defence of his own city. He escaped with his bombing plane from Bucharest on September 26th, and landed in Warsaw on the evening of the same day, a few hundred yards from the German trenches—only to learn that the city was in ruins, that food, water and ammunition had given out, and that Warsaw could no longer defend itself. Pilot Officer S. R. decided to take off again at dawn on September 27th, and he was one of the first Polish airmen to arrive in England. Now he is with his newly equipped squadron somewhere in the heart of the country.

He told me his story wistfully, recalling one by one the various phases of his last flight to Warsaw:

The Baneasa Aerodrome in Bucharest had not changed in the least. There were as usual the same control officers,



the same policemen, the same customs officers as on my previous trips to the Rumanian capital before the war; and of course there was the same bright display of lights twinkling all over this pleasant airport.

Yet something had happened which had disarranged the ordinary course of procedure. The control officer did not ask me in his pidgin-French whether I had enjoyed the flight; the policeman on duty did not stop me to see my passport; the fat elderly customs officer did not hurry across to chalk his initials on my luggage without troubling to have any of the trunks opened. For one thing, there were no trunks, there was no passport—there was nothing. . . . Still, I was there in Bucharest all right, and the trip might have been anything but pleasant.

Yes, there was undoubtedly a sense of change in the air. Something had happened. Mr. Y——, a frequent guest of the Balkanic aerodromes, as a civilian pilot of the Polish Air Lines, was there again—but this time as an interned Polish Air Force officer in uniform.

What else had changed? I don't know. It was impossible to say. Life in Bucharest continued on its same even, unperturbed course.

Gay, smiling people were still thronging the cafés. The shop windows displayed their normal abundance of merchandise, vaunting its extravagance in the brilliance of thousands of electric lights.

In the streets the pavements hummed with indistinct conversation, mingled with frequent bursts of happy laughter, or muffled by the roar of the motor traffic.

But already, in the dark, dismal rooms of the cheaper hotels, groups of Poles were meeting. There were Poles in the streets and the cafés—talking, wandering, thinking. And in all minds, on all tongues, was the question: "What next?"

The war was continuing; France was fighting, Britain

was fighting; and remembering the past century of struggle, the Polish internees in Rumania were making ready for the call: "For our freedom and yours."

When night had fallen, when the voices in street and café were still, then Polish exiles heard another voice: the voice of embattled Warsaw.

"For our freedom and yours!" Warsaw was suffering an incessant air and artillery bombardment; she had turned every house into a fortress, every street into a trench, and the people of the city, my people, were being buried under the falling roofs: fighting to the last drop of their blood, to their last breath, writing another page in the history of Poland's unending struggles.

There was no sleep for many a Polish refugee in Rumania. There was no sleep for me.

I summed up my efforts during the nineteen days of hopeless struggle against the overwhelming German superiority. From point to point I fled—fighting back, indeed, but fleeing nevertheless; the heroic warrior, who left his country, his city, his family, because he was told to make a present of himself and his plane to the Rumanians!

There was no sleep for me in Rumania. I belonged to Warsaw. I had to go back to my city.

On the morning of September 21st, in my sordid little room in one of the smallest of Bucharest's hotels, I learned the great news. I had a chance to go back—to fly back!

My plan of escape was very simple. I was known in Bucharest as a civilian pilot, and my aeroplane was a new type. I persuaded the Rumanian authorities that it was still the property of the Polish manufacturers.

The former representative of our firm got into touch with the manager of the Brasov works and suggested that the plane should be forwarded to Brasov, for the purpose of extending the existing licence, valid for the production of fighters, to this new type of bomber.

I knew that no aircraft manufacturer could resist such an offer, for in the existing situation the nominal Polish owners would not be likely to haggle over the proposed price. And I was right. Within half an hour of our interview the Rumanian manufacturer was engaged in a secret conference with the Air Minister.

After some little time, during which I anxiously waited in his office, he returned smiling. The Minister had agreed to the transaction, and a written order would be issued, authorizing me to fly the aircraft from Bucharest to Brasov. I was to be accompanied, however, by a Rumanian pilot.

There was no time to waste; I explained the situation to the other three members of my crew in their hotel, and together we set off for the aerodrome in a car which one of them owned. A smart grey car followed us all the way, but stopped near the main gate, without entering the aerodrome.

In charge of my interned aircraft was a young flight-lieutenant whom I did not know, but with the assistance of my old acquaintance the control officer I easily convinced him that the aircraft was really to be flown by permission of the authorities, and he accordingly agreed to allow the crew to handle it, in order to make the necessary preparations. There was much work to be done: the port fin had been seriously damaged in the previous day's operations, and though it had been repaired, it was fastened only by means of three small bolts. I had the remaining six bolts in my pocket. The starboard tyre was flat, and needed to be refilled. All this work had to be done in a leisurely fashion, so as to allow my air-gunner time to recharge the ammunition boxes, replace the removed guns, and test the turrets.

I never learned how they managed to smuggle the guns and ammunition under the vigilant eyes of four

sentries, but by next morning the aircraft was fighting fit, fully armed, and loaded with four thousand rounds of ammunition, nearly two-thirds of which were tracer bullets.

While the crew were at work a friend of mine who was to fly with me accompanied me back to the town, once more shadowed by the same grey car.

We learned that the written authorization had not yet come through, so we had to decide at once as to what steps we should have to take. To discuss our plans in the hotel would have been impossible, as the pretty dark-haired driver of the smart grey car occupied the room next to ours. So we set off in my friend's car, to give the young lady a good lesson in fast driving through the zigzag highways and byways of an Oriental city. After half an hour she gave in. We knew that anyhow she wouldn't take long to find us, so we went to one of the famous garden restaurants, where the small rustic tables were laid in the shade of walnut trees, and the strains of the Bohemian orchestra often gave way to the song of the nightingales. But we were in no romantic mood that evening, and we soon reached an agreement as to the tactics to be adopted.

Once in possession of the permit, we should apologize to the Rumanian pilot for having nothing to offer him but the choice between a parachute jump over Rumanian territory and an unexpected trip to Warsaw. Should the permit not arrive, however, we were to fall back on threats and the effect of surprise on the sentries when our rear gunner fired on them with the guns of his automatic turret. On leaving the restaurant we met our dark-haired guardian angel once more, and this time we simply couldn't resist the temptation of a friendly smile and . . . of another foolish race through the town, this time inspired by sheer maliciousness, as we went straight to our hotel, and so to bed.

I must confess that before going to bed I repeated the prayer which I used to say in my childhood. But before this I wrote a letter to my wife. I still have that letter. It was not a bad letter, but now it seems a little too emotional.

To annoy our dark-haired beauty we decided to leave the hotel singly. I was the first to go, and as I expected the little spy followed me. I went into a shoemaker's shop, while she admired the smart Vienna models in the window. And here I ought to apologize to the young lady for having kept her such an inordinate time in front of that window, while I left by the back door. It may be a consolation to her to know that I really did buy a pair of boots, which were rather expensive but very well made, and that I am still wearing them to-day while flying British aircraft.

At twelve o'clock we all met at the aerodrome, only to find that the permit had not come through. Unobserved, each one of us inspected his automatic, and quietly sat down to lunch. We could not take off before 3 p.m., or we should have arrived at Warsaw in broad daylight. While we were still at lunch the door was flung open, and I saw one of my Rumanian friends, a squadron leader, in the company of the flight-lieutenant who was in charge of my interned aircraft. With them was one of my Polish friends, and as they joined us at the table the atmosphere soon became convivial. With my friends' assistance, I easily convinced the flight-lieutenant that the written order had already arrived, and was in the possession of the Rumanian pilot who must be on his way to the aerodrome. As it was getting late he agreed that we should be allowed to warm up the engine.

The situation rapidly became tense. We had to work coolly and rapidly, as at any moment a new arrival or a telephone call might have upset all our plans.

By this time the crew were already lying on the floor of the aircraft, holding their guns in readiness. I climbed slowly into the cockpit and started the engine, increasing the revs slowly to warm her up.

My Polish friend was standing on the wing, whispering his farewell to me. Finally he descended, and we were left alone in charge of the aircraft.

I opened the throttle and began to taxi, wheeling to the right. There was a general rush in the direction of the aircraft, which, however, soon stopped when the air-gunner aimed his automatic weapon at the Rumanians. The aircraft gained speed rapidly, and soon took off, carrying four free men towards Warsaw.

Weeks afterwards I learned that a court-martial was held by the Rumanians in my absence, and that I was awarded a sentence of seven years' imprisonment, and in addition fined 125,000 lei. I do not mind the seven years, but why the fine?

The plan for the cross-country flight was simple enough: to climb above the clouds, and then fly on top of them, so as to be ready to take cover at any moment.

At 1,500 feet I disappeared in the clouds, only to discover that the gyro compass and the turn indicator were out of order. Here I must emphasize the quality of the small magnetic compass which allowed me to pierce through 13,000 feet of clouds and yet keep on the correct course.

Once over the clouds I was safe. The only thrilling moment was when, through a gap in the clouds, I saw Brasov with its aerodrome, which I knew was packed with Polish licence-built fighters. Who could have imagined that a day would come when the Polish fighters would be the last thing I should wish to see? But fortunately nobody came to disturb our lonely flight in the warm sunlight.

After three hours and twenty minutes I decided to come down and find my position. At first all was in perfect order; the clouds were harmless and hospitable. But very soon the misfiring of the engine gave me the first warning of trouble—ice. And before long all the panelling of my cockpit was covered with opaque ice. I opened the throttle and slowed down my descent to 300 feet per minute and 90 m.p.h., but gradually the clouds lost their foamy whiteness and their harmless character. Indeed, I soon found myself in the midst of a regular whirlwind of clouds and snow. My poor aircraft went dancing in all directions, losing or gaining height with the surprising rapidity known to and often remarked by pilots accustomed to flying over mountains. I opened the hood and fought a frantic battle with the elements, cursing the immobilized gyroscopic indicators. The struggle, however, did not last long. Very soon the aircraft reared and went completely out of control. I let it go, hoping for the best.

As soon as I could see the ground below me I easily determined my position, finding myself fortunately on the correct track, about a hundred miles inside German-occupied Poland. So up I went again through the inhospitable clouds, to find, after no more than ten minutes' flying, an almost clear sky, with a few spreading cumuli!

I continued on my course, following a zigzag route from cumulus to cumulus, expecting at any moment to be greeted by a burst from an enemy fighter. Though nothing happened, I welcomed with relief a continuous layer of clouds lying far below us. Down we went, hurriedly, to take cover. We were now only about thirty miles from Warsaw.

Warsaw had been fighting for twenty days. The city was surrounded by ten German divisions; it was shelled at night and bombed in daytime. To land a bomber in

## MY LAST FLIGHT TO WARSAW

this hell was the only part of our expedition that we didn't care to think about; still, we had to take our chance. We were lucky; once more good fortune shone upon us. As I emerged from the cloud—which was a cloud of smoke from burning Warsaw—I saw beneath me the aerodrome, crowded with German aircraft. One of them was just coming in to land, and descending in a wide curve a few yards below us. From the ground it must have looked as though we were crossing each other. This, I presume, accounted for the lack of any manifestation on the part of the German "flak."

Now, when so many problems were to be solved—as, for instance, the problem of diving to the ground in front of the German trenches, and negotiating bomb craters in the light of the flames that rose from the burning city—it was necessary to trust to intuition rather than to reason.

Eventually we landed in no-man's-land, at a point where the Polish and German trenches were separated by no more than four hundred yards.

Not a single shot was fired at us! To this day I cannot guess why. But I knew that this miracle was not likely to last, and our next move was to take cover in the nearest trench, which, fortunately, was manned by Polish troops.

Under the cover of the falling darkness the aircraft was pushed to the opposite edge of the field, close to the German positions. I realized how prudent this subterfuge was when a few minutes later, safely hidden in the trench, I watched a German battery of field-guns pounding heavily at the very spot on which the aircraft had been standing a few minutes earlier.

The intensity of fire increased, and I welcomed the invitation from the officer commanding the sector to wait in his shelter until the gun-crew returned.



Here I was among the heroes of whom I dreamt during the sleepless nights in Bucharest, and here were the men and women of Warsaw, waiting for the next attack.

For twenty days they had been fighting day and night; for twenty days they had been bombed, shelled and machine-gunned; for twenty days they hadn't slept, washed or shaved, and their wounds had been neglected for lack of medical supplies. They were without food and without water, but all they wanted was to fight on in defence of their city.

The intensity of the artillery fire gradually increased, and the barking of field-guns was soon joined by the deep roar of heavy artillery.

It was time for us to report to the Polish headquarters, so off we went. The night was dark; Warsaw was wrapped in a heavy smoke-screen. The streets, riddled with bomb craters, were covered with débris, and over this desolate hell of shattered pavement and broken water-mains stood the rows of the wrecked houses, grim, gaunt ghosts with glassless windows like empty eye-sockets.

The nearer I came to the centre of the city the worse was the devastation, the more frequently did the air resound with the explosions of heavy shells and the roar of collapsing buildings.

Nobody troubled to put the fires out; there was no water. Nobody attempted to bury the corpses—there were no intervals in the bombardment.

Finally the artillery fire became so intense that we crawled rather than walked through the last few hundred yards, and found with heartfelt relief the deep shelter of the Polish headquarters—where I learned that Warsaw was to surrender on the morrow.

I understood that all was over before I was told the truth in so many words. Even the finest morale of front-line fighters, even their heroism could not supply Warsaw

with the only thing which might have prolonged her agony—with ammunition.

Any hope of continuing the struggle disappeared, and with it went all that remained of my enthusiasm. I had come back to Warsaw too late. I felt depressed and terribly tired, and could hardly stand on my feet.

My brain refused to work. All I wanted, all I cared for was to sleep. I don't know how or where, but somewhere I found an unoccupied bed and managed to get into it. I do not know how long I was asleep. I was awakened by someone shaking my shoulder, and saw a Staff officer standing by my bed.

He brought me an order from the commander of the Warsaw defences. It was brief: "Leave Warsaw immediately with the purpose of reaching a neutral country." Then followed the name of an officer whom he had detailed to convey to the world the last message from the doomed city of Warsaw.

I did not know the name of the officer mentioned, but as I still had room for another passenger, I suggested that the heroic Lord Mayor of Warsaw, Stefan Starzynski himself, should come with me. I was told that he had definitely refused to leave his stricken city when it was suggested to him that he should fly to London with me.

Had I not been so terribly exhausted and depressed, I would have insisted on his flying to England with me. For the rest of my life I shall regret that I did not do so.

A car was waiting for me about a hundred yards from the entrance of the shelter, but it was two and a half hours before we could reach it, so intense was the bombardment. Dozens of times we attempted to leave the shelter between two salvos, and dozens of times we were compelled to crawl back under cover.

During this time forty people were injured, among them three drivers who volunteered to take us to the plane. At

last we succeeded in getting to the car, and after an incredibly slow drive we reached the last Polish barricade.

The aircraft, as I said before, was a few hundred yards from the German trenches. To start the engine would have meant suicide, and I had to take a quick decision.

I calculated that the expected attack would be launched just before dawn; and so we decided to wait until it began, hoping that in the din of artillery and machine-gun and rifle fire and the roar of the tanks the modest tune of our 1,000-h.p. engine would hardly be noticed.

In the meantime I went to inspect the state of the aerodrome. The result of this inspection was not encouraging: I had a free run of about a hundred and twenty yards, ending abruptly in two large bomb craters. If I succeeded in passing between them, I could gain another fifty yards.

I decided to jettison the petrol from all the tanks but one, so as to have a range of about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours' flying, long enough to reach the nearest neutral capital.

We lay down under the wings of our aircraft and listened with growing distress to the rare answers given to the Germans by the Polish battery nearest to us.

Then the floodgates of fire opened. I simply cannot find words to describe the combined noise of guns, tanks, rifle-fire, and bursting shells. Neither can I depict the chaos of lights created by the simultaneous use of search-lights, flares, and tracer bullets of every calibre.

There was no time for us to lose. I started my engine, opened the throttle to the full, and rushed forward, dazzled and deafened. I was lucky not to hit the first of the two craters, and as I felt the left wheel touch the soft sand I pulled the stick with all my strength.

The plane hesitated, then obediently clung to the air; but to climb was more than one could have asked of it, and the black silhouettes of trees, visible against the

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background of flames and dying embers, were approaching with terrifying speed.

I had no choice but to turn to the left, straight over the German trenches, and as I was completing this risky manœuvre a flaming onion flared up at us, narrowly missing the tip of our starboard wing.

This must have been the signal for a general attack, and I don't think there was a single anti-aircraft gun which was not firing at us. I came lower, as low as I dared, and fled, glad to escape from this hell of fire, smoke and ruins.





POLISH MEMBERS OF A BOMBER CREW PLOTTING THEIR COURSE



A POLISH BOMBER PREPARES FOR THE OFFENSIVE

[Central Press]

# BOMBING BOULOGNE

The Diary of  
Z. P.

*transcribed by*

F. B. CZARNOMSKI





## XIV

### BOMBING BOULOGNE

THE following fragments were transcribed from an authentic diary kept by a Polish pilot-officer since his arrival in England during the summer of last year. They depict the daily life of the many Polish airmen scattered over the airfields of England, Scotland and Wales, and reveal the spirit in which they carry on the good fight.

*July 15, 1940.*—We are doing a lot of flying—a course of intensive training—in day and night flying. Sometimes in the evening we drive into the nearest town supposedly to take lessons in English, but we spend the time gulping down gallons of beer.

*August 4th.*—We gave our first exhibition of dive-bombing exercises in flights of three. The show was attended by the English C.-in-C. Bomber Command and a group of English officers. Our squadron put up three machines. They went up as the second flight, and they dived quite nicely. The machines climbed, stalled, turned on the wings, and power-dived on the target. The bombs were only dummies, but the effect was very good and we were pleased with all the results.

*August 9th.*—Last night Pilot-Officer F. was killed on operational flight. He belonged to another squadron of a different group, but everyone liked him for his friendliness, and we shall all remember him with affection for a long time. Poor fellow, he will never see Poland again. He will be missing from his flight when one day, by God's mercy, it lands again on the Deblin airfield. Well, he was not the first to go, and he won't be the last.

## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

*August 10th.*—The funeral of P/O F. took place to-day. There were a few civilians present when his colleagues from both Groups followed his coffin draped with the Polish flag. We left him there, alone in that distant graveyard, under English earth. It was all rather sad, and most of our fellows were near to tears while they wished him—in the words of the song—"a quiet rest in that dark grave where he may dream of Poland."

*August 20th.*—A black saloon car brought King George VI to visit us. He took the salute from the Group Captain and inspected the Polish rank and file, examining all our fellows carefully. Our good-natured Kudelko Alois was somewhat disappointed because he hoped that the King would bring the Queen with him, and that they would both walk up and down under their crowns, wearing their ermine-lined purple robes.

Nevertheless, both Kudelko and everybody else was very happy to have the King with us for a few hours. Knowing that the King was watching, the boys did their damndest, flying with a terrific zest. After the flying exhibition there was a march past. We marched in fours like clockwork, in straight lines, with our forage caps worn in the Polish style, throwing our arms out with automatic precision. The King must have enjoyed it, for he smiled approvingly.

The royal visit concluded in our mess, as the King wanted to see us not only at work but also during our leisure. At the table he talked at length to the members of the various crews and took a lively interest in our war experiences. We told him of our struggles in our own distant country, and he seemed to be moved by our misfortunes there.

*August 22nd.*—We are moving to a new aerodrome, which is to be our war station. The first flights are taking off, just as almost exactly a year ago we were taking off

in Poland from all our peace-time aerodromes for the field stations.

To-day, after a year of this weary wandering through strange lands and seas, we are taking off again, lonely flights of airmen without a country.

The new aerodrome was so new that it had not yet been finished, but this did not affect our cheerfulness. One of the boys tortured a harmonica, another wound up the gramophone, a third got ready with his concertina. It seems we really are a musical nation. Here a fellow was fastening the picture of Our Lady over his bed-head, there another was manœuvring the photo of his sweetheart into the right position on the wall, while the rest were gazing hopefully on the long and deep rows of bottles lined up temptingly against the corridor walls.

*August 27th.*—The hospitable English drove us to the nearest towns in motor-cars. As behoves a Godfearing nation, we attended Mass with great fervour, however, disturbed by the pretty faces of some members of the congregation. We miss our Polish Mass very much. The fragrant incense, the songs, the organs, the Polish prayers, even the sermon of the honest parish priest, who knew so well how to move our hearts and souls. We longed for the "Holy Father, Holy and Eternal, be merciful," for the prayers we could understand without St. Peter having to employ translators.

After Mass we went sightseeing, visiting the Cathedral and the Castle, so different with its closely cropped lawns from our Czorsztyn rising in its proud ruins on the lofty rock above the rapids of the Dunajec.

Everything was pretty in this town, but the prettiest sight was the pubs, though they have two unpleasant shortcomings: they are frightfully expensive, and they close much too early.

*September 14th.*—An expedition. We are to fly there—across the Channel.

We shall fly across to the French coast, to place our bombs in the dragon's nests where the invasion of England is being hatched. But our joy at the expedition is troubled by the thought that only a short while ago our noble French allies were still there. Damn the fools for their idiotic capitulation!

Our boys stalked about with great earnestness, which seemed to have taken possession of both young and old. The ground staffs were making such a fuss about the machines and the boys who shall be the first to fly them. Shall I do this? Or perhaps you want me to help you in that? What comradeship! To-day we knew we were one true family-squadron. Finally, they took off, amid sympathetic farewells:

Hey—Alois, pay them out for Warsaw!

They circled over the airfield in the misty-red light of the setting sun. They formed into flights, they gained height and vanished southwards one after another at one-minute intervals. When the last black point had disappeared in the skies, those left behind scattered over the airfield, abandoning themselves to the tormenting speculation: Will they return—all?

The wireless operator remained at his post, listening-in to the machines. But the lamps of his receiving set yielded only a monotonous hiss.

We waited.

It is 10 p.m. The runway lights are switched on, the illuminated "T" for landing is out, and in the mess the drinks are ready too. Everything is waiting.

It is 10.15 p.m. Here it comes. At first it sounds like the buzzing of a gnat, then the hum of the engine grows louder—louder still, until the lights revealing position become visible.

## BOMBING BOULOGNE

After identifying himself, the pilot asks permission to land, and is answered accordingly. The plane makes ready to land and finally touches down in the beam of the airfield searchlight.

We rushed forward to see if all the bombs had been released. The first to land was Captain A. Our fellows will return later, because the bombing of the target must be well timed. Machine-gunning is permitted, and short bursts at the searchlights are useful, even if they are not hit, the Huns hate it.

But for all these operations over the target the English have allotted only a few minutes. We feel terribly sore about it. Our fellows are inclined to complain, because they have taken so much trouble and faced so many risks to come to England. They have been waiting so many months, and now they get only a matter of minutes in which to settle some accounts with the Hun.

Well, the authorities know what they are doing—it's their decision—and we have to stick to orders no matter how much the heart aches.

Our entire squadron came back by midnight. One and all.

*September 15th.*—The C.-in-C. of the Bomber Command and our Group Captain sent us congratulations on our successful first expedition.

We hear that our fighters are also doing well in the defence of London, and that so far they had brought down 80 enemy planes. Our army in Scotland, too, is doing well. Since the collapse of France we all seem to be doing well. The girls in particular are appreciative, but we pretend not to care much.

*September 16th.*—They took off for wretched Boulogne. As the ceiling over the target was low and the wind was blowing strongly, they were able to enjoy it to their hearts' content. Our boys dived like mad, tearing Basin

No. 6 to bits, together with the dozens of boats prepared for the invasion. They completely exhausted their machine-gun ammunition against any worth-while objective they could see, and came back all smiles. They returned after midnight and went to sleep in the early hours of the morning, tired out, happy and "heavy on the wing," as they had had a drop or two.

*September 24th.*—As our main targets we were assigned Ostend and Calais, and as secondary targets all harbours on the opposite coast in which the invasion was being prepared. The boys took off about midnight and they did not do badly, because they came home about the time when in the good old days mother was reminding them that it was time to go to school—7.30 a.m.

Only Makolagwa was disconsolate and fed up, because he did not get the D.F.C. for this expedition. He was stalking over the target till 6.15 a.m. but did not sink any cruiser; perhaps he did not sink her because there was none there. By way of consolation he released his bombs over Basin No. 3 and came home.

*September 26th.*—The squadrons left for Ostend. The moon was shining brightly, so that they had a charming and romantic journey. Not less charmingly did they drop some thousands of pounds of H.E. bombs on the German vermin, and to make the magic of this fine autumnal night in Ostend even more memorable, they gave them as many bursts of machine-gun fire as they could. All the machines returned safely.

*October 10th.*—The weather over England was rotten to-day, the clouds were low and a mist clung to the ground. But when we arrived over the targets the weather cleared a little, and flitting out of the clouds each of us gave the Huns a greeting by turning the release lever of the bomb rack. As we timed the bomb release very carefully we started some tolerably good fires.

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They were unable to bale out, as they were too low, so they just crashed on this English soil and somewhere three English sweethearts will be mourning for them.

With misty eyes, we picked up their poor mortal remains and placed them in three coffins, to let things take the prescribed course.

There were a few flowers in the little church, and the white and red flag was round their coffins. A handful of us were there, rather sad in our hearts, because they could have done a lot more to the Hun. They could have lived to see Poland free again, and with God's blessing they could have reached a great old age and died of senile decay—perhaps.

But an airman's lot is sometimes wayward, and so they are lying quietly in the grave, quite insensible to the tears of their sweethearts. They are indifferent now to our daily troubles and to our silly jokes—their souls are wandering beyond—perhaps far away in Poland.

At last our chaplain finished the unspeakably sad ritual. We hauled the poor beggars outside and carried the coffins shoulder high to the place of eternal rest.

*January 27th, 1941.—*

George VI R.I.

Elizabeth R.

*January 28th.—*We had a visit from the King and Queen. We knew the King since his last visit in B., but we were keen to see the Queen, to see if she is as charming in reality as she seems on the screen or in illustrated magazines.

To be sure, we made very careful preparations for the royal visit. For the Queen we ordered a bouquet of white and red roses and for the King we made ourselves as



smart as possible. In the mess herring à la Polonaise and our native vodka were duly prepared.

We turned out two companies of both squadrons, two files each, with the commanders in front and on the farther side of the hangar lurked the youngest lieutenant with the flowers. So we waited.

At last the black saloon car pulled up. The royal couple alighted. We presented arms, the Commander reported, and Jasinczak leapt forward with the flowers. He stammered something in English and, blushing like a flapper, he offered the flowers to the Queen. She beamed with pleasure, and the King seemed to be pleased too.

They walked along in front of the line, the Queen first, with the roses, followed by the King. The Queen's smile was so winsome, warm, almost motherly that our hearts melted and our faces brightened with pleasure, while many of us thought, "What a pity we haven't got such a Queen."

Then came the march past. We marched with such gusto that the hangar shook to the foundations. On the dais, against the background of Polish and British colours, holding our bouquet of white and red roses, stood the Queen of England with her fascinating, motherly smile. . . .

*February 11th.*—An expedition against the invasion ports. Captain S. with his crew and Sergeant K. took off.

There isn't much to be said about it. They went and placed the bombs beautifully in the docks and harbours among an assemblage of invasion ships. They had a go with their machine-guns at the searchlights, and before returning home they switched on their radio for transmission and told the Huns in Polish, German and French what they thought of them, so that they should know who was bombing them, and then they came home without any adventures. There was nothing more that day worth mentioning, except that the English Commander

## BOMBING BOULOGNE

of our station nearly cried with joy when he saw all our machines safely back.

Returning from a bombing raid a Czech crew landed near our aerodrome. As our leaders in London have decided that from now onwards we and the Czechs are one, we resolved to receive the kindred tribe with great solemnities. So we shared out the Czech crew among ourselves. First the officers entertained the officers and the N.C.O.s. Then the hosts swapped the guests and in the end the entire Czech crew was entertained in turn by the officers and N.C.O.s. We played them our Polish tunes on a mouth organ, then they sang their Czech songs, and in the intervals we mutually confessed our past sins. We talked a lot about the new life awaiting us, and we reinforced our arguments with numerous rounds of drinks. It took a long time to work out the perfect Polish-Czech union, but in the end we all gave it up and passed out completely.

*February 25th.*—At noon we received new orders for an offensive sweep. Eight of our machines were to take part. At 6 p.m. the final briefing. At 6.30 p.m. the take-off. At last an offensive sweep after a prolonged inactivity, caused by the unfavourable weather conditions. Our objective was the invasion port of Boulogne. From our squadron Lieutenant K. and Sergeant K. with their crews were taking part in the raid.

They had a difficult flight, but all machines reached the target areas and dropped 9,600 lb. H.E. and as many pounds of incendiaries on the Huns. The signs of vengeance were visible a long time, for the blaze of conflagration followed them most of their way back.

The English colonel was overjoyed to see the first crew safely back, but pulled himself up in time, stuck a monocle into his left eye and pretended he didn't care a hang.

All the crews returned safely.



# **“PASHKO’S” LAST SHOT**

*by* PILOT OFFICER W. U.  
*of* Fighter Squadron  
No. 303





*[Central Press*

THE SERGEANT HAS JUST SHOT DOWN AN ENEMY AIRCRAFT, AND HIS COMPANION  
TWO. NOTE THE POLISH EQUIVALENT OF "THUMBS UP"



MEMBERS OF THE CRACK POLISH FIGHTER SQUADRON WHICH ACCOUNTED FOR  
126 GERMAN AIRCRAFT IN THE BATTLE FOR BRITAIN, AUTUMN 1940

[Central Press

## XV

### “PASHKO’S” LAST SHOT

THE fighter pilots were standing by, fully dressed for battle, and ready to take off at a moment’s notice. The day was warm and sunny, and the crews and ground staffs of the squadron were lounging in front of the hut; some resting in deck-chairs, others stretched out on the grass.

We were all in high spirits. Only Flying-Officer “Pashko” seemed to be out of sorts, perhaps because during his previous flight there had been “nothing doing.”

We were chatting about air attacks, about single fighters and mass attacks, and exchanging experiences, when someone casually observed that it would be interesting to know the individual preferences of each of us. I turned to “Pashko” and asked him what was his greatest desire.

“All I want is that my last shot should not be wasted. Apart from that . . .”

The telephone bell cut him short. The operator on duty lifted the headphones and shouted the order “Take off!”

In two minutes the squadron was up in formation, one flight behind the other, heading for the South-East of London. “Pashko’s” flight followed Flight No. 1. The squadron climbed to 25,000 feet before reaching the Thames estuary. Visibility was good; only tiny white cloudlets were brushing past our wing-tips. Presently we could see the shining surface of the Channel, and beyond it the shadowy blue outline of the French coast.

On our left we had as neighbours two British fighter squadrons, which climbed as fast as we did. From the moment of taking-off we were directed by wireless, but



soon our radio began to register the sharp, rapid sound of Morse signals which often warned us that the enemy was near.

Our squadron received the order: "Course 110 degrees!" but soon afterwards we heard: "Change course to 120 degrees: Enemy bombers approaching you from South-East. Height, 25,000 feet."

The squadron gently wheeled to the right, and immediately in front of us we saw a group of enemy bombers flying in the direction of London. At a glance I estimated their number at about sixty. Above them glittered the yellow-nosed Messerschmitt 109 chasers, of which there were a great many. They certainly outnumbered us.

The squadron hovered lightly, while our formation loosened into flights of threes, and changing into battle order turned in the direction of the barrage thrown out by our anti-aircraft batteries. I released the catch of my machine-guns.

The enemy's bombers were flying in flights of threes in a tight formation, which is difficult to disperse, and the protecting Messerschmitts that were circling above the bombers were grouped in twos or fours.

Our squadron gained the necessary superiority in height to give it a convenient position for attack, which is most effectively launched frontally from above at an angle of about 120 degrees.

The first machine of our squadron rolled over on its right wing, followed by the second and third machine, and then by the second flight, and the third, making straight for the German bombers. Our machine-guns, housed in the wings, belched forth streams of bullets. Our squadron cut through the enemy formation, followed by the two British squadrons. The German formation was broken. I could see several of the Heinkels dropping out, leaving a trail of heavy black smoke. Single enemy

bombers attacked by individual fighters attempted to escape by zigzagging sharply: but they were too clumsy for our agile fighters. We just sat on their tails until a burst or two sent them down.

Some of the German machines attempted to break off and turn back, but they could not escape. In the general mêlée of dog-fights the sparkling tracks of the machine-gun bullets cut across the white smoke streaks issuing from the exhausts, and soon one more enemy bombing expedition against London was broken up.

At this very moment, however, the yellow-nosed Messerschmitts poured down and attacked us. The air became one great quivering confusion of planes, flying in threes or singly: Hurricanes, Messerschmitts, Spitfires, and Heinkels. The black crosses flashed menacingly before my eyes, followed by the red and white circles, the markings of our own Kosciuszkos and of the British fighters. Three or four burning machines left a parabolic trail of black smoke in the sky as they tumbled helplessly to earth. I could see a number of poor devils who had baled out. The white cupolas of the parachutes were clearly visible against the green background of the earth.

One flight of three German bombers, taking advantage of the general confusion, turned sideways, and I could see them making in the direction of a chimney-stack close to the river. I was going all out, and decided to cross their path. I was getting my sights on them, when suddenly, like a flash, one of our Kosciuszkos, with the letter M painted on its frame, overtook me, diving from above and going straight into the three bombers.

I could not observe the exact sequence of the events which followed. At one moment I noticed a torn mass of the frame and a few yards away a fragment of the wing of a Heinkel 111, but the next moment I could see a Hurricane spinning down and leaving a dense streak of

smoke behind it. It was the Kosciuszko Hurricane bearing the letter M.

By this time the other two German bombers were already far away, making for home. It was time to return. Our machines were flying singly at different levels, but in a northerly direction. I received by wireless the order :

“Return. Land.”

All my ammunition was spent by then, and automatically I secured the catch of the guns. One more wide circle, and I was off for home.

On landing I learnt that Hurricane M was “Pashko’s.” Though he was killed not on the Vistula but on the Thames, he knew that his last shot was not wasted.

THE BREAD AND THE SMILE  
OF ENGLAND

*as written by* ANTONI SLONIMSKI



## *Postscript*

### THE BREAD AND THE SMILE OF ENGLAND

ANTONI SLONIMSKI is one of the leading poets, playwrights, and political writers of Poland. He, who had fought all his life with the pen for every human cause, together with many other poets and writers of Poland, followed the Polish soldiers and sailors and airmen who crossed the continent to carry on the struggle for liberty. During the months he spent in France before its collapse he produced some of his most powerful and inspiring poems of the war; and then, for the second time within ten months, he had once more to leave everything, and together with the officers and men of the Polish Army and most of the other Polish writers and artists, he sailed for England.

After completing the collection of the stories included in this volume the Editor visited Slonimski and asked him to write a postscript to it. He consented, and the following morning the Editor received his script, which has been translated into English exactly as it was written in Polish :

We came here disillusioned and embittered by defeat, fleeing for the second time. Crowded into little cargo-boats or colliers, we left France sadder than when we had left Poland to continue the struggle, because then we were leaving our own country with an unshakable faith in final victory, convinced of the transient nature of our exile. But when the shores of France vanished from our sight a cloud of sorrow and despondency obscured our hope and our faith.

With our own eyes we had seen the great, the terrifying

## THEY FIGHT FOR POLAND

advance of destruction. Wherever evil and hatred, cruelty and villainy encountered a good cause—the victory was won by evil. Not only had our cities and houses fallen in ruins, but our faith in humanity also. All that was sacred and dear to us was poisoned with mistrust. More and more boldly were those lifting their heads who had long since allied themselves with wickedness, those who wanted to see Poland on the side of victorious evil, as a docile vassal in the service of the darkness which was sweeping over the world.

We were filled with despair as the irresistible wave of hatred flooded Europe. Every day brought a new triumph of our enemies. Victory was falling to him who had sworn our utter annihilation, the enemy who condoned every villainy and every crime. Where there had been freedom he brought tyranny, where there had been light and mercy he brought darkness and cruelty. We had gazed upon the final dishonour of all human dignity, upon the ruins of national memorials, the smoke of burning libraries.

The power of evil seemed invincible.

We came to England as soldiers defeated and betrayed, as writers broken by disbelief and bitterness, bewildered and distrustful, yet still thirsting for further battle. Here on the soil of England we were received with cordial hospitality. On the first day of our arrival a dock labourer gave us a friendly smile as he offered us his bread. And wherever we went this English smile was before us, and a simple, common, shy and modest goodness. Our faces brightened before this trustful and friendly smile.

We inhaled deeply, breathing a pure air, unpoisoned by weakness and hatred. We lifted our emboldened eyes to follow with growing confidence the victorious British aeroplanes sweeping across the sky. On this island dominating all the seas of the world we learned a different

law from that of the land. We learned the law of the sea, which halts great ships on their distant courses to send them wherever man calls for aid.

England gave us not only bread and a smile, but she gave us something far more important and more precious. She made us feel the strength and righteousness of our common cause. She revived our hopes, she reminded those who had been restored to life of truths which many of us had come to doubt. And we believed again that one may be strong and invincible without hatred, that one can fight with the greatest devotion without renouncing freedom, that true love of the motherland need not speak in the language of blatant nationalism.

We found ourselves in a country of free speech and conscience, in a country which does not fear even the bitterest of truths; in a country in which full knowledge and free will are the source of greater strength than the compulsion of penal discipline and blind obedience elsewhere.

The great Polish exodus to France after the defeat of 1813 afterwards carried back to Poland the ideals of the French Revolution. The soldier returning to his native land hid under his Napoleonic uniform a heart that beat more quickly, and he looked with different eyes upon the misery of his own soil.

When, after victory in this war is achieved, God leads us back into our country, we shall not forget England. We shall not forget the ideals and honesty by which this great nation is guided. We shall not forget the serene heroism of London, nor shall we forget the King who did not desert his people, or the people which did not betray its own greatness. In our innermost hearts we shall carry back all that we have learned from the great British democracy.

We have no fears that our country is not yet ready for



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true liberalism. He judges Poland ill who makes the strength and greatness of Poland dependent upon the law of violence and the lawlessness of dictatorial rule. We are not afraid that foreign models will contribute towards the speedy extinction of our own national characteristics. Polish traditions have never been either opposed to or far removed from the laws governing Great Britain.

The Nazi creed, and the profound immorality of totalitarian political systems, have always been alien to the psychology of the Polish people. We are not afraid of changes, however deeply they may enter into the structure of our social life, for true love of country is synonymous with the desire for the continual improvement of the object of our love.

The present war will not weaken democratic ideals. On the contrary, the democracies must emerge from this war stronger, bolder, and more deeply conscious of their aims and their duties to civilization. The enemy has shown us with fearful power and clarity that freedom is not an empty phrase. He has convinced us of that by his persecution and torture of the country we have left.

In this great war for the future of the world we stand at the side of England under the skies of liberty. Our heroic Polish airmen take the air equipped with the powerful and infallible wings of British aeroplanes. Our soldiers and sailors have been given trustworthy weapons. We have all experienced British hospitality, and we are not ashamed of the emotion of gratitude which every one of us feels in his heart. Gratitude for the bread, for the smile, for the arms, that England has given us, and for our rekindled faith in humanity and in victory . . .

# OVERLEAF

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Here are given the personal stories of those who fight for Poland against a bitter and ruthless foe. A survivor tells of the terrible ordeal in an open boat after the *City of Benares* was sunk ; a Polish pilot describes how, with the R.A.F., he fought the Luftwaffe over England ; and there are the stories of day-to-day life in Warsaw when Poland struggled against the furious onslaught of an enemy who had every advantage.

By geographical position perhaps the most unfortunate country in the world, Poland has been a battleground for a thousand years, enduring wars and partitions, wresting independence from Russia and Germany after the war of 1914-18, only to be assaulted twenty years later by the full fury of German militarism subserving Nazi aims. But Poland will rise again : the spirit of her people, so clearly evinced in these personal stories, assures that, and she will take her rightful place in a peaceful European scene.



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